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Joseph Cornell's "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas": Archive and Performance

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Joseph Cornell's "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas": Archive and Performance

by

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Thesis

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Dedication

Dedicated to Col. Perkins, Mr. Blaine, Ms. Saenz, and Dr. McCarthy for teaching me to love history.

Acknowledgements

The idea for this project originated in Dr. Ann Reynolds' course *Magazine as Archive: View 1940-1947*, so acknowledgment is due to the many members of the seminar who taught as much as they learned. Thanks to Dr. David McCarthy for the confidence he gave me at Rhodes College. Dr. Ann Reynolds read several drafts and provided invaluable feedback, support, and encouragement throughout this process, pushing me in the best way possible. Thanks are also due to Dr. Linda Henderson for her thoughtful feedback. This project would not be possible without the efforts of the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution to digitize vast amounts of their materials. I am also indebted to the many scholars before me who have written about Joseph Cornell and his works. Finally, I could never have finished without the help of Dan Lothringer, Carolyn Welch, Steve Welch, and Charlotte Sadie.

Abstract

Joseph Cornell's "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas": Archive and Performance

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In this thesis, I explore the June 1946 issue of *Dance Index:* Joseph Cornell's "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas." Through the archive of materials collected and presented by Cornell, I attempt to understand the histories of performance offered to the magazine's readers. Despite the rich field of scholarship dedicated to Cornell and his art, very little work has been dedicated to his contributions to *Dance Index.* I interpret "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" as both a collage and a series of histories, and I present the magazine as a serious work in Cornell's oeuvre. I also endeavor to provide an understanding of Cornell's working method, his sense of history, and the ways his juxtapositions of word and image provide meaning to readers. Weaving together the visual and textual, contemporary and historical, Cornell explores performance legacies, American and European exchange, and pantomime, dance, and circus performance tradition through this magazine issue. Cornell uses each of his diverse materials to explore larger social and political issues as well as artistic traditions. "Clowns, Elephants

and Ballerinas" represents a crystallization of a moment in one of his many "explorations."

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Introduction

Lincoln Kirstein introduces the June 1946 issue of *Dance Index* by Joseph Cornell with his "Comment."[1] This text, written in correspondence with Cornell, provides a preface to Cornell's intricate creation:[2]

> Many amateurs love the vaguely preposterous past, but few pursue it with the affectionate surgery and relentless skill of Joseph Cornell. He is brother to the scientist who recreated a whole pre-historic age from the glimpse of a dinosaur's tooth. From a fragment of a program, a set of lithographs, a couple of footnotes and reference in a letter, Mr. Cornell evokes splendid evenings completely lost.[3]

Cornell "evokes splendid evenings completely lost" throughout the magazine, conjuring lost pantomimes, dancing elephants, and riding ballerinas. He makes those evenings live by placing evidence of the past next to that of the present. Is a contemporary photograph any more or less real than a documentary print? Is a novel any less of a record of an artistic moment than a film? Each source demands equal treatment, and each represents a whole world of context. Although the issue came together through careful research, Cornell does not ask his readers to undertake the same process. Rather, he offers

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[1] The bulk of the material available in the file related to "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" in the Joseph Cornell Papers at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art is undated. Most of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus materials come from their 1945 touring season. The few dated materials come from between February and June of 1946, just prior to the publication of the magazine. Notes in the archive include the words "For LK to be revamped" in Cornell's hand, indicating that Cornell sent certain pages of his drafts to Kirstein for review. Other pages bare the words "Miss Eames," referring to Marian Eames the acting editor of *Dance Index*.

[2] Although I came to the quotation independently, through the magazine, both Ellen Levy and Dickran Tashjian refer to portions of the same paragraph by Kirstein in their discussions of the relationship between Marianne Moore and Joseph Cornell. I will discuss their contributions further in my chapter "Elephants."

[3] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 135.

connections, including sources that the magazine's audience would be familiar with immediately. He balances the obscure with the obvious, placing a 19th century theater properties list next to a Méliès film and a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey publicity photograph next to an unidentified print. Cornell's evocations in "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" reanimate lost performances through analogies between the contemporary and historical.

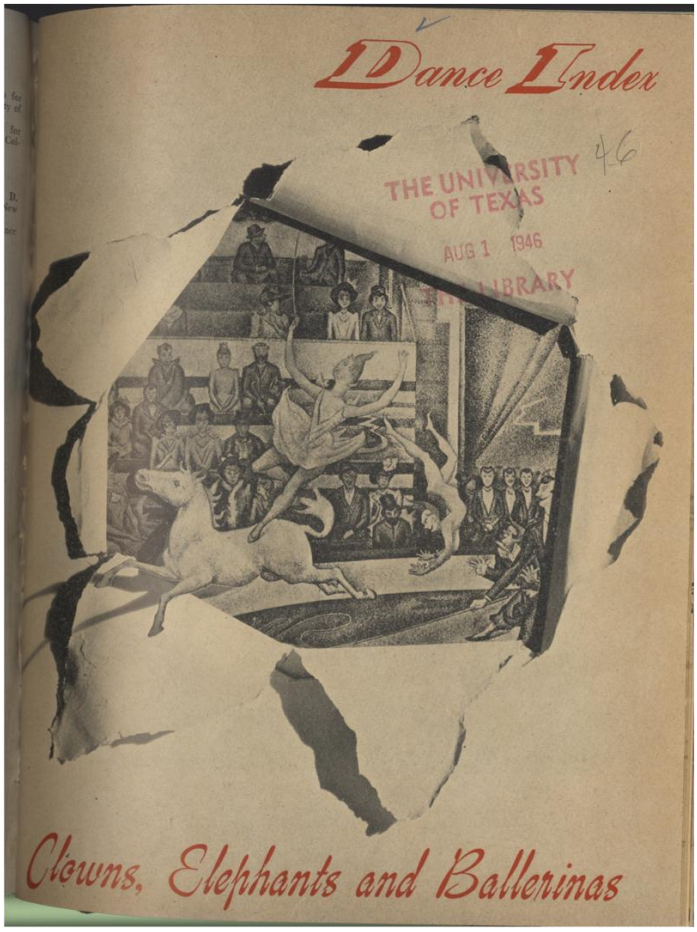

Illustration 1. "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" with Georges Seurat's *Le* Cirque (1890-1891). Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 133.

On the cover of the magazine, framed by large, red titles, a woman balances impossibly on a horse, anchored by a single foot *en pointe*. The horse gallops or leaps, none of its legs touching the floor of the arena. Behind these figures, a sizeable crowd impassively observes, stacked one on top of another in tall bleachers. An acrobat hangs upside-down, mid-flip, completing a circle anchoring the center of the composition. To the right, a man holds a whip, which slides under the horse, its rider, and the acrobat. A member of the troupe reacts to the performance, miming shock and amazement for the audience. This entire spectacle is in the process of breaking out of the magazine's world and into the reader's space. Joseph Cornell excised the horse from the painting, making it leap towards the viewer and cast a shadow on a flap of paper. The painting appears to be on a layer just beyond that of the titles, which has been ripped back to reveal a previously hidden circus. The torn paper casts realistic shadows, lending the overall image a tromp-l'oile effect. The cover demands that readers turn the page and explore the show inside, for the circus has already broken into their world through *Dance Index.*

Lincoln Kirstein, Paul Magriel, and Baird Hastings founded *Dance Index* in 1942. The magazine would continue to be published for seven volumes, folding in 1948. In the first issue, the editors laid out their goals for the new enterprise:

> What we do must be more than useful, better than good. At the present moment, there is no place in America where articles as exhaustive as those to be published

> here are available…. These articles will be concerned with the visual arts, music, human gesture and behavior, traditions of morals and habits.[4]

Although dance unsurprisingly underpins the 56 *Dance Index* issues, its founders aimed to explore more than just dance. *Dance Index* was advertised in parallel little magazines and dance trade magazines, such as *View* and *Dance News*.[5] Although it seems to have been primarily circulated in New York in the city's budding dance community, *Dance Index* made it as far as Texas, where the University of Texas at Austin libraries held an original subscription.[6]

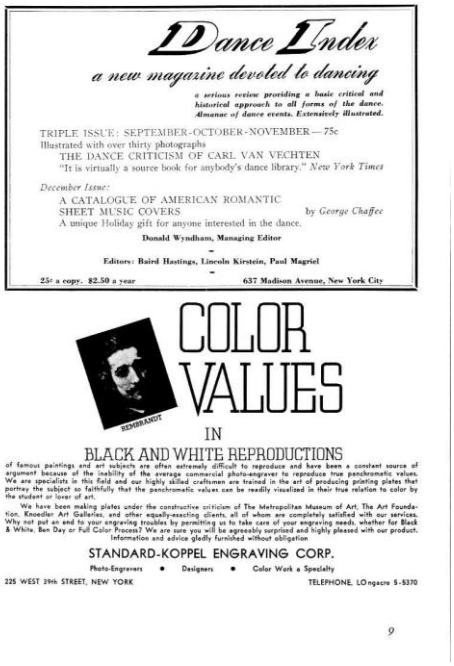

Illustration 2. Advertisement for *Dance Index* in *View*. Ford, Charles Henri and Parker Tyler, ed., "Fantastica Americana," *View* Vol. II, No. 4 (Jan. 1943), p. 9.

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[4] Hastings, Baird, Lincoln Kirstein, and Paul Magriel ed., *Dance Index: A New Magazine Devoted to Dancing*. Vol I, No 1. New York: Ballet Caravan, inc., January 1942.

[5] It is through one of these advertisements in *View* that I first discovered *Dance Index*.

[6] The Fine Arts Library at the University of Texas at Austin owns a complete run of the *Dance Index*, which includes stamps indicating that the magazines came to the libraries weeks after their original publication, visible on my scanned reproduction of the cover.

It is through the bursting of a modernist circus into the reader's realm, that readers enter the magazine. Cornell highlights this image, a bold intervention into Georges Seurat's work *Le Cirque* (1890-1891), on the cover—the only work in the magazine that he alters beyond cropping or excerpting. The theme of the circus brings together the three subjects of his issue: clowns, elephants, and ballerinas. By placing this theme under the umbrella of *Dance Index*, Cornell points to several issues—pantomime and its influence on the very beginnings of dance; the modern circus circuit and the overlap between dance as art and dance as entertainment; and the inherited legacies of contemporary performers. By broadening the subject from pantomime (a subject even the most conservative dance scholar would accept as related to dance) to clowns and then from clowns to circus, Cornell plays with the reader's expectations and finds confluences among the presumably disparate areas of performance, art, and dance.

Throughout the magazine, Cornell points to shared histories by juxtaposing contemporary sources with historical ones, drawing primarily from the 19th century and early modern era. Cornell labels each image and text with a characteristic attention to detail, reminding readers of the work's historical or contemporary provenance. All of these sources—the multiple types of media, historical periods, and subjects represented—bring together a sort of archive built by Cornell. As he tells us on the last page of the magazine, his materials come from his own personal collection and those of several reputable archives: the Ringling Collection, the New York Public Library, the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Yale Theater Collection. That his materials come from such established cultural institutions points to the professionalism as

a photo researcher with which he approached his role as editor of this issue of the magazine. Cornell brings his experience creating commercial collages for publications like *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping* to his much more personal expressions in *Dance Index.*

Many scholars have commented on Cornell's archival tendencies, pointing to his boxed portfolios like *Portrait of Ondine* and *Duchamp Dossier* as examples. The portfolios currently housed at the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art exemplify this archival impulse. Cornell meticulously kept records of his own collecting, cataloguing and filing his materials in a series of portfolios and dossiers. These files were divided by subject matter, ranging from bibliophilia to bird watching, romantic ballet to Robert Motherwell. "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" combines many of these interests: animal engravings, modern ballet, romantic ballet, 19th century bibliomania, film clippings, film printed materials, poets and poetry, to name a few of the subject folders he might have drawn from while compiling his "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" dossier. His archive also includes one portfolio dedicated to this *Dance Index* issue.

Despite the rich field of scholarship devoted to Cornell and his archival interests, only two scholars have discussed "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" beyond mentioning its existence. Both Ellen Levy and Dickran Tashjian discuss primarily two pages of the magazine: a photograph of a young woman on an elephant and a poetic essay by

Marianne Moore.[7] Tashjian also briefly describes the cover of the magazine. Neither deal with the magazine as an independent creation by Cornell, but instead think of the two pages as emblematic of a relationship between two creators—Moore and Cornell. Beyond Levy and Tashjian, several Cornell scholars mention the existence of "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas;" some only acknowledge that Cornell designed the cover.[8] Many scholars omit some of Cornell's work for *Dance Index* altogether, mentioning that he created two or three issues for the magazine without naming any.[9] Cornell was in fact the creative force behind four complete issues.

Although scholars seem to have forgotten, ignored, or minimized Cornell's work for *Dance Index* (describing it as "graphic" or "commercial"), Cornell certainly took this work seriously:

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[7] Levy, Ellen, *Criminal Ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the struggle between the* arts. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 77- 128. Tashjian, Dickran, *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire*. Miami Beach: Grassfield Press, 1992, pp. 72-77.

[8] The following appears in the chronology portion of the extremely thorough and well-researched *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp… in resonance*: "June Cornell conceives and designs the cover "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" for *Dance Index* (vol. 5, no. 6). He bases the cover design on Seurat's Le Cirque." *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp… in resonance*. New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1998, p. 289. This sort of mistake, possibly stemming from the reproduction of the cover in a few publications such Tashjian's *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire*, has led to the occasion exclusion of Cornell's work for *Dance Index* in his larger oeuvre. Again, in Jodi Hauptman's convincing text *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema*. "29. This [Seurat's *Le Cirque]* must have made an impact; he would later integrate it into a montage published as the cover of *Dance Index* 5, no. 6 (June 1946), an issue devoted to the links between ballet and the circus. Cornell offered his extensive ballet material to the editors of *Dance Index* for illustrations of their articles, but the artist also designed numerous covers of the journal and edited a few issues on topics particularly dear to him."Hauptman, Jodi, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 212.

[9] This misconception may have come from a reprinted speech given by Donald Windham at Cornell's memorial service. "Joseph Cornell and I met at the Office of *Dance Index* magazine, late in 1942 or at the beginning of 1943…. In the next three years, while I edited the magazine, Cornell designed many of the collage covers and put together two whole issues of his own work, one inspired by the pas de quatre danced in London in 1845 by Taglioni, Grisi, Cerrito, and Elssler, the other on Hans Christian Andersen and the ballet." There were two issues by Cornell during Windham's tenure as editor, but there were two additional issues after Windham left the magazine. Windham, Donald, "Things That Cannot Be Said," *Joseph Cornell Collages, 1931-1972*. New York: Castelli, Feigen, Corcoran, 1978, p. 11.

> From the way you spoke of Prof. Einstein, I got the impression that this gentlemen is a friend of yours. [Sic] And so I have been wondering if it might be in the realm of possibility to put before him a few of the new sand boxes both for his pleasure and possibly a word or two of appraisal or commendation.
>
> As long as I have been making the objects my feeling has been a more serious one that of mere 'amusement' a category into which they have been shoved too often in the 57th Street galleries. Should I be fortunate enough to obtain an honest line or two from the prof. I should feel as though not so many years have been wasted in making 'amusing' objects…[10]

In this letter, written in 1946, Cornell expresses his frustration at being found "amusing," seeking approval from one of the world's most recognized intellectuals to rectify this perceived sleight. Given Cornell's correspondence with Marianne Moore expressing a similar desire for approval for "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas," it is a mistake to treat his editorial work with any less seriousness than is afforded his boxes, portfolios, and films.[11]

When thinking about "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" as an independent work of art, it is important to keep in mind that although the subject matter seems diverting, this issue is not meant to provide mere entertainment. Much of the current scholarship on Cornell implies that he was interested in only personal delights or explorations.[12] Cornell

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[10] As quoted in Ashton, Dore, *A Joseph Cornell album*. New York: Viking Press, 1974, p6. The letter, from Cornell to J. B. Neumann, is dated 1946.

[11] Letter dated November 1, 1946 from Cornell to Marianne Moore, reproduced in its entirety in *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind*. "I regret that so little of the enchantment that I felt while working on the Circus issue of Dance Index got into the pages… Mrs. Eames [Marian Eames, editor at *Dance Index*] showed me your letter commending the Circus issue which relieved me no end." Caws, Mary Ann ed., *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and* Files. New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, pp. 133-134

[12] Although many feminist and queer theorists have influenced my thinking in this regard, this quotation from Margaret A. Lindauer's *Devouring Frida* resonated particularly strongly. "As Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen note, 'The phrase 'the personal is political' rejects the traditional exclusion and repression of the personal in male-dominated politics. It also asserts the political nature of women's private individualized

was a member of his society, a man who worked for the war effort, who had many friends in the service, and who had a stake in the well-being of France. An avowed Francophile, Cornell could not have read of the goings-on in France during the Second World War with a disinterested eye. Although he did not travel, did not join the army, or lose family members in the war, he was as engaged as any American of the era was in the goings-on of the wider world. His collection of wartime news clippings makes it clear that he was keenly aware of America's "'golden age' before W. War II… an era gone."[13]

Part of this "golden age" for him, it seems, were the popular pre-war entertainments of silent film and the circus. As a result, Cornell's *Dance Index* issue published the year after the war had ended may seem to be hopelessly anachronistic, concerned with this by-gone era of "innocence." But it is exactly through his insistence on innocence, his anachronistic silent-era impulse, that he suggests to his readers the trauma of the period. That this childlike innocence might seem out of place reminds readers that such guilelessness was once common, that not all children grew up surrounded by blackouts, rations, depression, and air raids.

Throughout this thesis, I very consciously privilege archival sources as well as materials that I either know or have reason to believe Cornell could have accessed during the creation of the magazine, over secondary sources. In this way, I hope to maintain

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oppression.' Texts that most powerfully relegate Kahlo to a feminine sphere of apolitical art and private life uncritically and insidiously sequester the artist from broader social contexts." Lindauer, Margaret A., *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011, p. 5

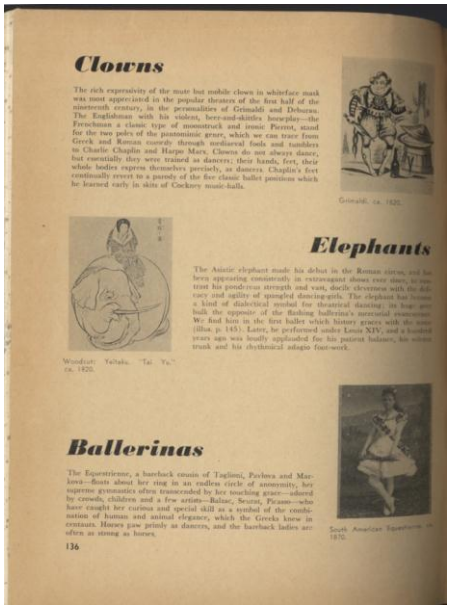
[13] Note dated Feb. 4, 1947. "'the golden age' before W. War II—perspective – an era gone etc." "Notes and Writings, 1941-1972, undated," Box 16, Folder 16. Joseph Cornell papers, 1804-1986, bulk 1939-1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

some fidelity to Cornell's experiences and processes in putting together this issue of *Dance Index*. This exploration at times makes assumptions about audience, but does so based on Cornell's writings and the meanings that it seems Cornell attempts to tease out for his *Dance Index* audience. This thesis is in no way solely based on Cornell's biography and although Cornell's process is certainly one of my primary concerns, "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" always provides the starting point for my analysis.[14] I do not attempt to explore "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" against the totality of Cornell's oeuvre, but I do bring in particularly related works by the artist at times in order to provide a richer understanding of my chosen *Dance Index* issue by acknowledging his work elsewhere with similar subject matter and formal concerns.

I started this project with an intention to reconstruct the archive used to create "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas." This is possible but cumbersome. Thus, I have refrained from including a discussion of every single image and text included in the issue as I originally thought I might. Instead, I have decided to provide a close analysis of two or three pages of the magazine per chapter. I hope to provide my reader with some taste of the concepts and forms built into each portion of the magazine in this way. I have divided my thesis, as Cornell divided his magazine, into three thematic chapters: Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas. I encourage my reader spend time with the magazine as I have,

[14] Deborah Solomon's book *Utopia Parkway: the life and work of Joseph Cornell* is a thorough account of Cornell's life. Dore Ashton's work *A Joseph Cornell album* represents the first, though less thorough, accounting of his life after his death. Solomon, Deborah, *Utopia Parkway: the life and work of Joseph Cornell.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997. Ashton, Dore, *A Joseph Cornell album*. New York: Viking Press, 1974.

so that the larger themes and connections within it will become even more apparent, based on my focused analysis.



Clowns

The rich expressivity of the mute but mobile clown in whiteface mask was most appreciated in the popular theaters of the first half of the nineteenth century, in the personalities of Grimaldi and Deburau. The Englishman with his violent, bare-and-skittles horseplay—the Frenchman a classic type of monostruck and ironic Pierrot, stand for the two poles of the pantomimic genre, which we can trace from Greek and Roman comedy through mediaeval fools and tumblers to Charlie Chaplin and Harpo Marx. Clowns do not always dance, but essentially they were trained as dancers; their hands, feet, their whole bodies express themselves precisely, as dancers. Chaplin's feet continually revert to a parody of the five classic ballet positions which he learned early in skits of Cockney music-halls.

Grimaldi, ca. 1820.

Elephants

The Asiatic elephant made his debut in the Roman circus, and he's been appearing consistently in extravagant shows ever since, to contrast his ponderous strength and vast, docile cleverness with the delicacy and agility of spangled dancing-girls. The elephant has become a kind of diabolical symbol for theatrical dancing; its huge gray bulk the opposite of the flashing ballerina's surcoatal evanescence. We find him in the first ballet which history graces with the name (Illus. p. 145). Later, he performed under Louis XIV, and a hundred years ago was loudly applauded for his patient balance, his solemn trunk and his rhythmical adagio foot-work.

Woodcut: Yeiheiu. "Tai Yu." ca. 1820.

Ballerinas

The Equestrienne, a bareback cousin of Taglioni, Pavlova and Markova—floats about her ring in an endless circle of anonymity, her supreme gymnastics often transcended by her touching grace—adored by crowds, children and a few artists—Balzac, Seurat, Picasso—who have caught her curious and special skill as a symbol of the combination of human and animal elegance, which the Greeks knew in centaurs. Horses paw prissily as dancers, and the bareback ladies are often as strong as horses.

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South American Equestrienne, ca. 1870.

Illustration 3. "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" contents page. Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 136.

Throughout my thesis, I use the term "readers" to refer to the audience Cornell addresses in "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas." I maintain that we should approach the issue as a part of the serious work in Cornell's oeuvre, but believe that the experience of the magazine is equally a process of reading and viewing. Unlike much of Cornell's assemblage and collage work, the pages are filled with extended excerpts, not small snippets. In this way, readers "read" both text and image, shifting between each from page to page. There is a fluidity built into the magazine that resists a strict division between the two types of visuality of reading and viewing. Because "Clowns, Elephants

and Ballerinas" is part of the larger context of *Dance Index,* whose individual issues often consisted of long-form essays, it seems most appropriate to think of Cornell's audience as readers applying their experience with past issues of the magazine to this admittedly different issue by Cornell.

I have also insisted on not reading the magazine through the lens of psychoanalysis or personality. I think it is unfortunate that Cornell scholars sometimes fail to deal with some of the most interesting aspects of his work when they describe him as naive," "obsessive," and "nostalgic." Although I respect and appreciate the many queer and psychosexual readings of Cornell's work, I think that the key terms they use such as "playful" and "eccentric" can easily substitute for true analysis.[15] Such readings can become ways of dismissing his work as much as they can illuminate some themes. I hope that this thesis avoids falling back on readings that place the focus of their analysis on Cornell's presumed desires and repressions.

[15] There are many examples. Dickran Tashjian's *Gifts of Desire* deals with queer and psychosexual readings of his artworks as gifts: "At their most intense, Cornell's desires engendered complete identification with the other…. Gift giving with such motivation created anxieties beyond those inherent in ordinary exchange. Each presentation risked a misunderstanding that was tantamount to rejection. To compound the problem, Cornell often invested his gifts with visual motifs of gender doubling, sexual metamorphosis, and androgyny. Such images transgressed cultural norms even though his offerings were made out of reconciliation and love." Tashjian, Dickran, *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire*, pp 18-19.
I have also found Jodi Hauptman's *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema* useful and rewarding. It relies quite heavily on psychoanalytical readings. Hauptman, Jodi, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Chapter 1: Clowns

> The rich expressivity of the mute but mobile clown in whiteface mask was most appreciated in the popular theaters of the first half of the nineteenth century, in the personalities of Grimaldi and Deburau. The Englishman with his violent, beer-and-skittles horseplay—the Frenchman a classic type of moonstruck and ironic Pierrot, stand for the two poles of the pantomimic genre, which we can trace from Greek and Roman comedy through mediaeval fools and tumblers to Charlie Chaplin and Harpo Marx. Clowns do not always dance, but essentially they were trained as dancers; their hands, feet, their whole bodies express themselves precisely, as dancers. Chaplin's feet continually revert to a parody of the five classic ballet positions which he learned early in skits of Cockney music-halls.[16]

Here in his introductory synopsis of the section, Cornell begins to define what he means by his title, "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas." *Clown* refers not only to the classic American circus clowns he illustrates on the inside cover of the magazine, but also more broadly to the art of pantomime and the use of gesture in performance. In fact, his "Clowns" section focuses on mimes, at the expense of circus clowns, and explores one physical aspect of clowning in particular: the gesture. Silence, gestural communication, and physical comedy typify Cornell's pantomime. In other words, the men on which he concentrates performed through gesture and without language. Cornell points to this sort of performance as an artistic tradition, a legacy that Americans inherited from French and British forebears.

In his opening paragraph, Cornell also mentions a key connection between pantomimic traditions and dance: "they were trained as dancers; their hands, feet, their whole bodies express themselves precisely as dancers." Such an intense education of the

[16] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 136.

body suggests that pantomime is dance's sister art. Cornell visually reiterates this connection through his inclusion of images of mimes ballet positions.

Illustration 4. Ringling-Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus clowns Harry Dann and Lou Jacobs. Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 134.

Because both dance and pantomime require silence, both types of performers use live, bodily performance and precise training to develop a system of gesture that can overcome local meaning to achieve a sort of universality. In a brief note in his portfolio

on "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas," Cornell refers to this: Charlie Chaplin's "universal quality."[17] Dancers and mimes both learn their arts through bodily education. A teacher transfers knowledge from their person to the pupil's, body to body, engendering a lineage of artistic tradition. Cornell tells us the tradition, evident in France and Britain, has roots in ancient Greece and Rome. This heritage, still active in the performances of Harpo Marx and Charlie Chaplin, Harry Dann and Lou Jacobs, represents a continuous line of artists extending back before even the beginnings of ballet.[18] He argues that all pantomime can be traced through these relationships to two seminal men: Joseph Grimaldi and Charles Gaspard Deburau. In this way, the audience watching Charlie Chaplin also watches the great masters of the ancient world.

Cornell largely ignores the clowning traditions of the travelling circus. He focuses instead on the performers of the past who worked in concert theaters or as contemporary film performers. In this way, he subverts the most obvious meaning of his title "Clowns." A survey of the *New York Times'* usage of the word "clown" between 1942 and 1946 reveals that it mostly appeared in two contexts: as a description of circus performers or

[17] A brief note in Cornell's archive refers to Chaplin's "universal quality." "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946, undated. Box 17, Folder 20. Joseph Cornell papers, 1804-1986, bulk 1939-1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[18] Harry Dann and Lou Jacobs are the clowns pictured on the inside cover. Cornell does not identify in the magazine. Both clowns are identifiable by their characteristic make-up, which clowns consider something of a trademark according to clown tradition. Harry Dann can also be recognized by the duck, which he was known to have a gift to train. This photograph was probably part of the press-package sent to Cornell by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, as both clowns were part of the 1945, travelling cast. A page in Cornell's archive includes a large headshot of Lou Jacobs along with press provided by the circus. "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

as a label for a humorous or ridiculous man.[19] The term referred specifically to pantomime only very rarely. Cornell only briefly nods to the sawdust rings by including one photograph from the contemporary Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and a few lines about a circus clown bit included in an essay on Joseph Grimaldi.[20] The traditions on which Cornell focuses are more analogous to dance traditions than circus clowning; that is, less focused on broad humor. In fact, the pantomime tradition of the Commedia dell'Arte points to the very root of ballet.[21] He ignores the female Commedia dell'Arte characters, instead depicting only men as clowns.

Cornell's introductory text highlights not only the idea of lineage, but also the specifically English and French traditions within which American comedic performers worked. Cornell acknowledges that these traditions, which seemed fundamentally American (the three ring circus, the comedic film star), were not American inventions but merely extensions of popular arts in England and France. American performance comedy

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[19] I have found only eight uses of "clown" specifically referencing pantomime in my survey of over 400 articles with the word between 1942 and 1946 printed in the *New York Times*. I chose to survey this period, from the beginning of *Dance Index* to the publication of this issue in June 1946, in order to have a manageable data set.

[20] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 138. I refer to the circus as "Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus" following their own current convention.

[21] Lincoln Kirstein discusses the *Commedia dell' Arte* in his *The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*. "This was the popular Italian comedy, or more exactly the native farces of Italian towns, out of whose each particular locale emerged a comic figure, until a whole roster of classic personalities was brilliantly formulated, to replace the lost Roman *Fabulae Atellanae*, which had a similar arising. The Italians were inborn artists in the use of mimicry and earthly humor. The masks they invented for Harlequin, Colombine, Pantaloon, Scapin, the Captain and Punch in his various forms were as immediately popular in Paris as they had been in Bergamo, as they would be in London or Vienna. A famous company of these comedians, the *Gelosi*, created a furore in Paris as early as 1571. [Sic] Their plays were not written, but improvised spontaneously by the actors, upon a repertory of a hundred familiar intrigues, filled with salty local allusions and decorated with *lazzi*, contriving clowning, acrobatic tricks or broad slapstick which the spectator grew to love as the very badge of the *commedia*." Kirstein, Lincoln, *The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing.* New York: Garden City Publishing Co, 1935 reprinted 1942, pp. 183-184.

did not spring from Zeus fully formed; rather, it transformed, magnified, and was inherited. Charlie Chaplin and Harpo Marx, those great pantomimes of Hollywood, allowed audiences across the country and the world to experience the performances of Joseph Grimaldi and Charles Gaspard Deburau, those great pantomimes of Europe. Cornell argues this was the gift of silent actors in film.

Cornell draws these themes of lineage, inheritance, and performance together through his juxtapositions of image and text. He includes sources both contemporary and historical, using diverse materials that stand out aesthetically to make subtle arguments. *Dance Index* was aimed at an intellectual elite, the American community committed to bringing dance as art to the United States. Aware of *Dance Index*'s audience, Cornell does not pander or spoon-feed his material. Rather, he communicates his ideas subtly through both written and visual sources. Each source opens its own world, an endless maze into the minutia of Cornell's many research interests.[22] More importantly, each source opens up a specific world to Cornell and *Dance Index's* audience. Each image recalls a larger event; a still recalls a film or a moment in a whole performance. Each excerpt comes from a larger text.

The Golden Thread of Pantomime Tradition

On page 140 of *Dance Index,* four images occupy an equal amount of space, evenly positioned in each of the four quadrants of the page. A central dividing line

[22] Many scholars discuss the "puzzles" in Cornell's work. I do not think that this issue is a puzzle, but an intense exploration. Because an audience intensely interested in the history of dance read *Dance Index*, many of its themes and resources that Cornell refers to would have been familiar to them. Moreover, *Dance Index's* erudite audience would enjoy the obscure source not as a puzzle, but as a new piece of information.

stretches between the two top and bottom images, emphasizing the equivalence of each space. Two short blurbs of text connect the top images, each framed by an arrow pointing towards the object it captions. A single male figure appears in each of the four images, although each image is distinct.

Reading the images as we might read a book, left to right and top to bottom, the first image is a print.[23] It is the only print on the page, but very similar to two on previous pages.[24] The print depicts a knife-wielding man grinning menacingly. Beside him is a barrel topped with a basket filled with oysters. The subject wears a jumper covered in polka dots, knee socks with garters, and a prominent ruff. Makeup covers his face, swaths of paint carving out his jawline and the apples of his cheek. His hair is combed upward to form a peak at the center and out towards his ears, emphasizing his receding hairline. He holds an oyster in his left hand, preparing to open it with the knife in his right. He stands on a planked floor with his feet turned out, "a parody of the five classic ballet positions."[25]

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[23] The print is a black and white reproduction of an undated color etching by George Cruishank.

[24] In total, there are six prints of Joseph Grimaldi. The first Cornell subtitles "Grimaldi, ca. 1820." It is a black and white reproduction of a hand-colored etching published by J. Fairburn at an unknown date in London. (p.136) J. Allen Westminster published the second in 1823 as a "halfpenny" advertisement for a Grimaldi performance at the Royal Covent Garden Theater "in the Pantomine of Harlequin & the Ogress. (Sic)" (p. 137) The third is an etching by W. Greatbach after a drawing by T. Raven published by Richard Bentley in 1838. (p. 138) The fourth is a black and white reproduction of a hand-colored etching by W. Heath, published by J. Palser in 1812. (p. 139) The fifth is that by Cruishank. (p. 140) The final and sixth print is an etching by Rudolph Ackerman published in London in 1807. (p. 156) I believe Cornell accessed all of these images in reproduction from A. E. Wilson's *King Panto: The Story of Pantomime*, which includes extensive sections on Grimaldi. Cornell includes two paragraphs excerpted from the book on page 139. Images of the original prints can be found via the Victoria and Albert Museum (Grimaldi prints by Fairburn, Heath, Cruishank, and Ackerman) the Joseph Cornell Collection at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art (print by Westminster) and the University of Illinois project for portraits of actors (print by Bentley after Raven).

[25] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 140.

Illustration 5. Joseph Grimaldi, Harpo Marx and Charlie Chaplin. Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index*. Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 140.

To the right of this image, Cornell inserts a caption, bordered by an arrow pointing towards the grinning man.

> The unrivalled clown is represented in the act of opening a number of oysters from a barrel; and the very way in which he leers at the bivalves and the manner in which he brandishes an exaggerated oyster-knife, at once suffices to convince you that the man had inherited from his Italian father the most subtle of the mimetic powers.[26]

The unattributed quotation, which earlier pages reveal to be part of a description of Joseph Grimaldi, emphasizes the figure's skills as a pantomime, his "most subtle of mimetic powers." Written by 19th century bon-vivant George Augustus Sala, the excerpt

[26] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 140.

focuses on the figure's gestures.[27] It is the *gestures* of the figure—his leering mouth, his exaggerated brandishing of the knife, his confrontational square stance—that makes this print a depiction of pantomime, not just a costume or even a punch line. The brief mention of "his Italian father" recalls Cornell's indication on the earlier page that Grimaldi inherited his gifts for gesture from his dance-master father.[28] In this way, Grimaldi's pantomimic skills are a legacy from his father, which Grimaldi then passed onto future pantomimes.

Below this text and its arrow, another arrow points to the right and another short text captions an image. "More than a century later, Harpo's leer, his wide-eyed surprise and frenzied glee amid the familiar atmosphere of confusion and happy destruction, shine for us as a continuation of the golden thread of pantomime tradition."[29] Through this sentence, Cornell explicitly connects Harpo Marx to the tradition of pantomime. He connects Marx to Grimaldi through his use of descriptive emphasis on posture and attitude. "Wide-eyed surprise and frenzied glee" parallels "the very way in which [Grimaldi] leers."[30] Cornell also indicates his own interest in "the golden thread of pantomime tradition." Marx carries on this tradition, which Grimaldi inherited from his father. Thus Cornell labels Marx a pantomime, not a clown. These terms are not

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[27] Sala, George Augustus, "Pantomimes Past and Present," *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known*. London, Paris, and Melbourne: Cassel and Company, 1894, pp. 103-122.
[28] "The son of an itinerant pantomime actor and dancer (who later became a ballet-master and was engaged by Garrick for the pantomimes at Drury Lane) Joseph Grimaldi was born in 1778." Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 138.
[29] Ibid, p. 140.
[30] Ibid, p. 140.

equivalent for Cornell, and the texts and images he uses make it clear that the section explores pantomime, not clowns.

The image of Harpo Marx, a still production photograph, indeed does depict happy chaos.[31] Marx stands with his body slightly askew, facing the camera but with his body pointed towards the lower left of the image, thus engaging with the text and images on the rest of the page. Behind him, a couch and scaffold fill a derelict room, all of which appear to be covered with trash and fallen wallpaper. Marx holds a paintbrush up to his face, pushing his characteristic countenance through the bristles. His right arm falls to his side, relaxed, mirroring Grimaldi's knife-wielding right arm. He crosses his eyes and blows out his cheeks. He wears a pair of worker's coveralls with long sleeves and heavy boots. Although apparently working to repair the destruction around him, readers can imagine that Marx has caused this mess, the "familiar atmosphere of confusion" Cornell describes in his caption of the photograph.[32]

Below the dividing lines, two more images anchor the bottom half of the page. Both are images of Charlie Chaplin; the photographs (like that of Harpo Marx) are recognizable as film stills through Chaplin's characteristic costume and theatrical gesture.[33] Chaplin inhabits his classic role, the Tramp, recognizable primarily through his

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[31] Cornell does not give any information in the magazine concerning the Marx still. It is a production photograph of Harpo Marx during the wallpapering scene of *A Day at the Races* (1937). The photograph was probably part of Cornell's collection, which included many production photographs and film stills.

[32] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 140

[33] The two photographs of Chaplin are stills from his 1928 production *The Circus*. They, like the Marx production photograph, probably formed part of Cornell's collection of film images. Cornell donated some photographs published in Parker Tyler's 1948 work *Chaplin: Last of the Clowns.*

costume. In the left hand image, Chaplin faces towards the interior of the page, pressed back against a wall by a large, male lion. A box lifts the lion slightly so that, threateningly, it stands as tall as the Tramp's lower chest. Both lion and man are behind bars, apparently imprisoned together. This still, from Chaplin's 1928 film *The Circus*, depicts the Tramp's accidental discovery of the lion's cage next to a travelling circus. The Tramp's overly large pants and small waistcoat echo the proportions of Grimaldi's spotted suit. His feet turn out, again parodying classical ballet's first position. Chaplin's countenance is a comic picture of fear, and his body presses against the wall as though to push through it. The readers peek through the bars of the cage to see a man's encounter with an animal.

In the still to the right of the image of the caged Tramp and lion, Chaplin voyeuristically peeks through a hole in a tent. Again, Cornell positions the photograph so that the Tramp's body faces towards the center of the page, reversing his orientation in the other photograph. Again, Chaplin stands in first position but *en demi-pointe*, in order to achieve enough height to peep through the tent's fabric. Whereas Marx's posture appears weighted due to his lowered head and drooped shoulders, Chaplin's stretches upward. He even grabs his overly large pants, pulling them upwards as he stretches, as though to help him grow taller.

The inclusion of two images from *The Circus* encourages the readers to bring to the magazine their previous experience of this Chaplin film. As a major release and one of the last true silent films, it seems likely that some of the magazine's audience would be

able to draw on their personal memories of this movie. We see the Tramp accidentally trapped in the lion's caged railcar, which he stumbled upon in his effort to escape the police. Cornell suggests to readers with memories of the film that the Tramp is perpetually down on his luck, running from the police after accidentally stealing a man's wallet. Although readers could not make this connection without seeing the film, Cornell seems to use the themes not only from these stills but also from the film itself. The cops-and-robbers chase echoes Cornell's discussion of Grimaldi's own frantic chase scenes in his 19th century pantomimes on the previous page. In this text, Cornell also describes something similar to the "happy destruction" which surrounds Harpo Marx:

> A touch of Harlequin's bat changes the Nelson monument, a load of ship's blocks becomes the ship *Victory*, out of which is taken a tiny sailor…. The Clown and Pantaloon take refuge in furnished lodgings, which progresses to bare walls at the touch of Harlequin's bat to the bewilderment of the two lodgers. Chair after chair slips through the wall or the floor, fire-irons take their way by the chimney, candles whirl round when wanted to light a cigar, window curtains dissolve to nothing, sofas and tables take their departure, chimney ornaments fling themselves at Clown, and the huge looking-glass falls on his head with a fearful smash, leaving him standing in melancholy astonishment in the empty frame.[34]

Through visual echoing of similar circumstances, Cornell weaves his sources together in such a way to suggest that the tropes of silent film pantomime as represented by Marx and Chaplin seem clearly to stem from classic pantomime performances of the 19th century.

All of the pantomimes included in the magazine, from the two Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey clowns inside the front cover to Grimaldi and Marx and Chaplin,

[34] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p.139.

actively viewed their performances as functioning as engaged social criticism. On page 138, Cornell includes a brief anecdote about a contemporary, politically-engaged skit performed by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus clowns:

> The modern circus still carries a "Grimaldi" in its roster of clown types…. but these are faint echoes of a glorious tradition. The "Adam Smasher" of this year's Ringling Brothers-Barnum and Bailey circus, like similar bits in other years, is a fill-in that gives, however, a vivid and sparkling flash of the horseplay of the endlessly involved and bewildering transformations and metamorphoses that were the glory of the English pantomime. And the crew of motley zanies that circle the sawdust ring with their outlandish gag paraphernalia during the performance accord silent and touching homage to Grimaldi.[35]

The "Adam Smasher" referred to a skit performed by Paul Jung. The March 30, 1946 *Billboard* describes the Adam Smasher: "A heavyweight man is placed in the contraption where a 'hammer' strikes him on the head. The payoff—four midgets come walking out of the machine."[36] The headline, "Atomic Research Prompts New Gag for R-B Clowns," points to the act's engagement with contemporary issues. The gag enacts a transformation (a large scientist into four smaller scientists) just as in Grimaldi's act when "a touch of Harlequin's bat changes the Nelson monument, a load of ship's bocks becomes the ship *Victory*, out of which is taken a tiny sailor." Both skits use humor and transformation to point to political issues in their time—the atom bomb and the British war with Napoleon's France respectively. Chaplin's Tramp and Harpo Marx similarly used

[35] Ibid, p.138.
[36] "Atomic Research Prompts New Gag For R-B Clowns," *Billboard*, March 30, 1946.

transformation to point to political and social ills. The Tramp becomes temporarily famous in the circus. Marx perpetually unsettles high society with his antics.[37]

Georges Méliès and "Le Théâtre de Deburau"

Set against three film stills, an actual filmstrip anchors the center of page 141. These five frames represent a few seconds of Georges Méliès' *Le Magicien* (1898).[38] Surrounded on all sides by text, this page reverses the image-text ratio on page 140, in which four images surround a small area of text. Here Cornell explores seriality, both in image and text, by using the filmstrip to point the readers towards classic French silent film and the idea of repetition. The repeated images and the relative smallness of each image immediately arrest the eye. Because of each frame's small area, it is also easier for the readers to notice the changes, frame to frame.

[37] I do not refer here to a specific Marx film, because the final magazine issue does not refer to a film. In his notes, Cornell variously considers *Duck Soup* and *Animal Crackers* as the best examples of Marx's pantomime. He considered including a long paragraph discussing one of Marx's typical entrances, in which Harpo very obviously disrupts the social norm with his antics.

[38] *Le Magicien*, directed by Georges Méliès (1898; France; Star Film) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN-Ye7m2xN4

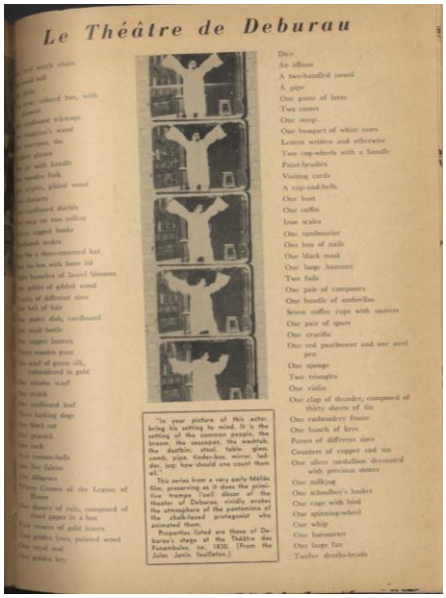

Illustration 6. Excerpt from Jules Janin's feuilleton on Deburau and five frames from Georges Méliès' *Le Magicien.* Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 141.

The central figure wears a dark cap, white makeup, and white suit with large, bell-shaped sleeves that identify him as the famous French pantomime character Pierrot. Pierrot stretches his arms above his head, and opens his mouth into a wide O in an expression of surprise. This expression barely changes in the first three frames. Pierrot's head turns only slightly to the right. By the fourth and fifth frame, Pierrot looks toward his left hand, having slightly bent his knees and twisted his body to emphasize the direction of his gaze. He gestures subtly, but surely. He does not whip his head to the right, but bends his knees and turns his head towards the object of his attention, an exaggerated move to help his audience understand the direction of his gaze. Cornell asserts the film's material qualities, as something possessing a physical presence of its own, by not cropping the edges of each frame.

Surrounding the filmstrip, Cornell includes text that details the physical belongings found in Charles Gaspard Deburau's theater around 1830. Together the text and image allude to the pantomime tradition in France, just as the pantomime traditions in England and America were explored on the previous page. The contents of the list vary widely, from "one shower of rain, composed of tinsel paper in a box" to "whiskey glasses."[39] Many of the objects are fanciful: "one magician's wand," "one royal seal," and "one silver medallion decorated with precious stones."[40] Many are mundane: "a pipe," "two razors," and "one milkjug."[41] These fabulous and plain objects combine to suggest a picture of a magician's lair, where a milkjug has its place next to "clockwork snakes."[42] Cornell includes a quotation to caption both the filmstrip and list. "In your picture of this actor, bring his setting to mind. It is the setting of the common people, the broom, the saucepan, the washtub, the dustbin; stool, table, glass, comb, pipe, tinder-box, mirror, ladder, jug; how should one count them all."[43] In this quotation from Jules Janin, Janin lists everyday objects "of the common people." When combined with the information on the following pages concerning Deburau's performances, Janin seems to suggest Deburau's ability to entertain by gesturing with the humblest of props and his connection to the people. He is a performer for the everyman. What makes him special, and what connects him to Méliès, is his ability to transform the mundane into the extraordinary. Both Deburau's performances and Méliès's films allowed for an existence

[39] Ibid, p.141.
[40] Ibid, p. 141.
[41] Ibid, p. 141.
[42] Ibid, p. 141.
[43] Janin, Jules, *Deburau*. Trans. Winifred Katzin. New York: R.M. McBride, 1928.

where the special could become ordinary and vice versa. This prompts audiences to imagine such a transformation in their own lives.

Although Cornell's caption does not specifically identify the film in the magazine, it does tell us that the filmstrip comes from "a very early Méliès."[44] Screened at MOMA and popularly released earlier in the century, films by Méliès would have been familiar in style to most of the magazine's audience, even if they were not familiar with the particular work included in the issue.[45] Cornell certainly saw similar films, which he describes in his diaries. The particular film Cornell chose to include in *Dance Index* conforms to the classic style of Méliès's early films. Their repetitious transformations, such as the sudden change of one character into another or the sudden appearance of a new object, interested Cornell.[46] These types of transformations make the mime magical. They are not specific to Deburau or to Méliès, but present in many of the pantomimes illustrated in the magazine. Each mime transforms himself in his performance just as he transforms objects. Harpo Marx conjures objects out of his coat. Grimaldi changes a war memorial into a real ship with a touch of his baton. The transformation marks their performances, making them something more than the common sort of gestural

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[44] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p.141.

[45] According to MOMA records, they exhibited films by Méliès twice in the years prior to "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas" publication. *Georges Méliès*: *A Film Pioneer* May 10-September 30, 1939 and *Georges Méliès*: *Magician and Film Pioneer* December 27 1944-January 14, 1945. Unfortunately, the registrar files for the first exhibition are no longer extant and the second is not available to the public. According to their website, there is currently a moratorium on requests to process new files for viewing, so I am unable to access the extant registrar file. "Exhibition Files of the Museum of Modern Art in the Museum of Modern Art Archives," last modified 2010. http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/ExhDocChartf.html

[46] It is impossible to know if Cornell saw *Le Magicien* in its entirety. I suspect he did. If not, he very accurately describes its quality in his notes, perhaps drawing from other similar early Méliès films. "Méliès at his best carried on the metamorphosis business in a very vivid manner." "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

communication in staged ballets.[47] As Kirstein explains in his work *The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*, the inclusion of pantomime marked the beginning of narrative ballet and specifically the development of *ballet comique* and the *ballet mélodramatique.*[48] Kirstein describes very early theatrical ballets, a *ballet mélodramtatique:* "The action was consecutive, coherently demonstrated by pantomime and sung words, and as for plot, it only served as a pretext for danced entries, noble or buffoon, terminated by the familiar *grand ballet* executed by all the masquers."[49]

[47]Kirstein discusses the history of ballet and pantomime extensively in his 1935 work *Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing,* republished in 1942. In the comments page of "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas," he says the following about pantomime and ballet. "The dancer as lyric artist has two great fields of expression: the pure vocabulary of the classic international dance, and pantomime. While he forges ahead with the first, he quite forgets the second. Only the circus clown still reminds us of the golden age of King Panto, when everything was made clear poetically and even realistically by brilliant dumb-show, derived from Neapolitan comedians and French travelling players. Dancers have much to learn from the clowns." Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 135. Kirstein, Lincoln, *The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*. New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1935 reprinted 1942.

[48] Kirstein, Lincoln, "Ballet Comique," *The Book of the Dance,* pp. 148-167.

[49] Ibid, p. 165.

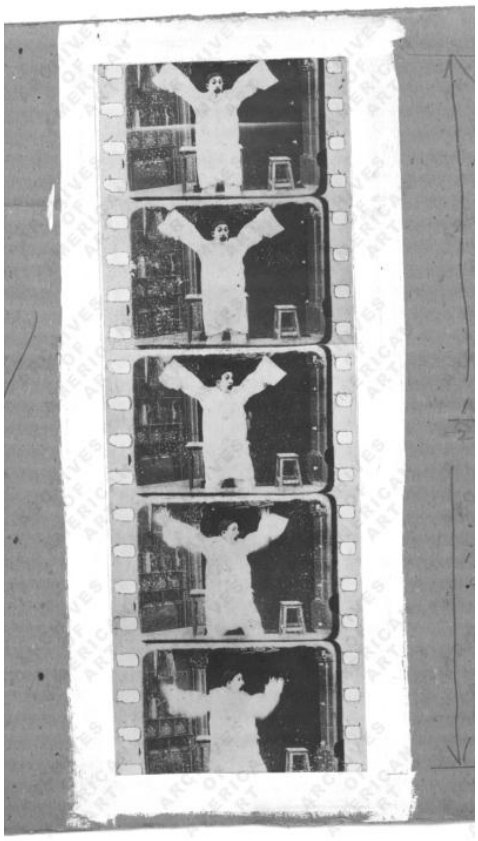

Illustration 7. Five frames from Georges Méliès *Le Magicien* (1898). "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946, undated. Box 17, Folder 20.Joseph Cornell papers, 1804-1986, bulk 1939-1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Cornell's inclusion of images from this very early film makes a connection between very early and later silent film. Classically, the still images convey movement frozen in the camera's gaze. By including five frames rather than just one, Cornell references time. Had Cornell used just one central image from the film, surrounded by the same text, the frame would become a portrait of the character Pierrot, not a sort of excerpt of a performance. In fact, Cornell worked with images of Pierrot very early in his

career, including a reproduction of Jean-Antoine Watteau's *Gilles* (1718) in his *A Dressing Room for Gilles* (1939).

Illustration 8. Cornell, Joseph, *A Dressing Room for Gilles*, 1939. Construction. Private Collection.

This reproduction of an academic Rococo oil painting fairly looms out of the box construction, brightly papered in a diamond blue and gold pattern. Cornell's reproduction whitened "Gilles" to such a degree that his hands almost disappear into his white costume. The whiteness also makes Gilles even more the Pierrot. Rather than using a similar Photostat reproduction of an artist's representation of a Deburau-style Pierrot, Cornell included documentary images—both photographs and film stills—of the performers themselves. He emphasizes the actor over the character, discussing each pantomime performer by name.

Cornell includes only contemporary prints of pantomime performers, photographs, written descriptions, and film stills. He omits a vast body of work in traditional media (paintings, drawings, sculpture, fine art prints) by traditional artists of clowns and pantomime. At one time, his notes indicate that he considered including a Georges Rouault image from the 1938 edition of *Cirque de l'Etoile Filante* in the magazine.[50] He could easily have constructed his whole section on "Clowns" with classic modernist art. Instead, Cornell relied on popular imagery, film, photographs, and earlier pre-modernist work. Cornell does not use one of Rouault's many clown or mime images because they are not the subject of Cornell's explorations. "Clowns" does not explore the character of Pierrot, but rather the men who played Pierrot. Rouault's paintings and prints, although certainly dealing with a similar theme, do not connect to the historical legacy of live performance that interests Cornell.

[50] MOMA exhibited Rouault twice in the period before the magazine's publication. *The Prints of Georges Rouault,* September 28-November 18, 1938 and *Georges Rouault,* April 4- June 3, 1945. "Exhibition Files of the Museum of Modern Art in the Museum of Modern Art Archives," last modified 2010. http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/ExhDocChartf.html The note in the archive says the following, in a list of various sources included in the magazine. "Roualt 'Cirque de l'Etoile Filante' p. 36. Vollard 1938 engraved by G. Aubert color etching copyrighted. [Sic]" He apparently crossed out the typed note at some point before publication, along with several other sources. A few of the crossed out sources eventually made their way into the final issue, despite his apparent indecision. The page 36 which he refers to is an image of a child equestrienne performer. I chose to discuss Cornell's exclusion of Rouault's clown imagery rather than the particular image in Cornell's note because it is apparent to me that Cornell saw the published book and would have been familiar with not just the equestrienne print but many of Rouault's works. It seems significant to me that although he had exposure to *Cirque de l'Etoile Filante*, Cornell does not include a single image from the book. "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812-circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Illustration 9. Georges Rouault, "Plate XIV: Pierrot," *Cirque de l'Etoile Filante*. Color etching and aquatint on paper. Printed 1938.

The concentration on documentary sources suggests that they represent records of events rather than independent images. Even the prints function more as records of Grimaldi's performances than as independent images. Their captions remind the readers that the image depicts an actual person working in an actual performance, and the texts describe performances or audience reaction to a performance. The list surrounding the Méliès filmstrip consists of actual artifacts connected to a performer. In these ways, Cornell alludes to the importance of live, individual performances, props, and performers. The materials that he includes do not attempt to fully reconstruct the performances, but instead "evoke" the spirit of those past evenings.

The stills of Chaplin do not recreate the moving pathos of his pantomime. Neither does the photograph of Harpo Marx show the true joy of his physical comedy. But each image can conjure the referenced performances to the readers. In a similar way, readers are encouraged to imagine the power of performances by Deburau or Grimaldi. In this

issue of *Dance Index,* Cornell grapples with the same problems explored in the magazine's other issues: the challenge of describing live performances long in the past through the physical material that surrounded and survived them. As Lynda Roscoe Hartigan explains, "Intuitively understanding the evanescent nature of dance," and here pantomime, "[Cornell] began to assemble his own dance archives as well as a large group of boxes and collages to celebrate historical and contemporary ballerinas."[51]

Together, five frames from Georges Méliès's *The Magician* and a list of belongings from Deburau's famous Théâtre de Funambules serve as evidence of a genre. Each works as the physical record of particular performances. In this way, they conjure for readers a bit of the magic of those performers. They also reference a larger performance tradition. Each specific performance represents the culmination of an historical legacy, one moment in a continual stream of the practice of pantomime. Continuity, then, with the past is present for the readers through these objects and through the continuing performance tradition. For the audience of *Dance Index,* this continuation could best be seen in the most current iteration of Deburau's Pierrot—the 1945 film *Les Enfants du Paradis*—which would shortly be released in New York.[52]

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[51] Hartigan, Lynda Roscoe, "Joseph Cornell's Explorations : Art on File, " *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp… in resonance,* p. 226.

[52] *Les Enfants du Paradis*, directed by Marcel Carné (1945; Paris: Société Nouvelle Pathé Cinéma, 2002) DVD. Cornell was aware of this work and mentions it in his notes. *Les Enfants du Paradis* did not premiere in New York until late 1946, so he works purely with the idea of the film. For this reason, I do not include a more extended discussion of the seminal work and its relationship to "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas."

Portrait of Pantomime

Together, all of Cornell's sources combine to create a portrait of the art and history of pantomime. Ever mindful of his primary audience, Cornell emphasizes pantomime's connection to ballet through gesture. At the same time, he distinguishes between the two by pointing to the particular characteristics of pantomime generally not found in ballet or other gestural arts. As Hartigan describes in reference to Cornell's dossier projects, Cornell's magazine allows for multiple meanings based on the experiences brought by readers to the magazine:

> To those who prefer the linear or who are unschooled in the finer points of everything from Cerrito's biography to all of art history, the contents will certainly appear disconnected or haphazard…. Specific knowledge is absolutely unnecessary as long as one is open to enjoying a "bouquet of the past and the present." The intent and process are highly associative, and the work invites us to join the artist in experiencing the materials gathered and offered in the spirit of "image making akin to poetry."[53]

Poetic, authorizing the free association by readers, but constructed with the poet's attention to detail, "Clowns" becomes fuller when each association on the page is fully pursued.

Cornell's construction of the magazine combines a rhythmic interest in visual imagery and narrative found in film. For Jodi Hauptman, "the cuts of both his collages

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[53] Hartigan, Lynda Roscoe, "Joseph Cornell's Explorations : Art on File, " *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp… in resonance,* p. 227. As reported by Hartigan, "bouquet of the past and the present" comes from a diary entry of July 16, 1951 in the Joseph Cornell Papers. "Image making akin to poetry" comes from Cornell's statement in the pamphlet "Portrait of Ondine Continued" and in drafts in his papers. Hartigan, Lynda Roscoe, notes "Joseph Cornell's Explorations : Art on File, " *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp… in resonance,* p. 242.

and his visual/textual projects bear strong resemblance to filmmakers' editing strategies."[54] She states:

> [Cornell's] metaphysique d'ephemera brings together past and present, confusing strict chronological sequence, creating a form of historical fiction: texts composed of fragments and castoffs, past events described through detritus, vocabulary invented from what others have left behind.[55]

These "fragments and castoffs" brought together become a collage of "detritus," an "invented vocabulary" only clear when each piece is in conversation with the others. Cornell's extended collage "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" combines sources from across continents and centuries to create a multi-faceted picture of not just of clowns, elephants, or ballerinas, but pantomime, dance, and circus performance tradition. He transforms the noun that titles each of his chapters into the action that each performed, "evok[ing] splendid evenings completely lost" for his readers.

The circus, with its three rings, allows for a triple act. It allows for the brief overlap of each—a ballerina on an elephant, a clown next to an equestrienne—but it maintains individual stages. The clown may perform in the center ring or move to the periphery, but he remains a clown. Cornell's clown conjures new objects out of thin air, transforms old objects into things new and fascinating, and (most importantly) transforms himself. In this self-transformation, Cornell seems to imply the possibility of his readers' own transformations. Readers can see the possibility of magic through the simple change of costume and a careful gesture. Cornell and his readers could feel that magic in the still-active pantomimes on film, performing their comedy in the tradition of greats like

[54] Hauptman, Jodi, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema*, p. 49.
[55] Ibid, p. 39.

Grimaldi and Deburau. In Cornell's next chapter, elephants, too, transform—from wild to civilized, clumsy to elegant, and docile to violent.

Chapter 2- Elephants

> The Asiatic elephant made his debut in the Roman circus, and has been appearing consistently in extravagant shows ever since, to contrast his ponderous strength and vast, docile cleverness with the delicacy and agility of spangled dancing-girls. The elephant has become a kind of dialectical symbol for theatrical dancing; its huge grey bulk the opposite of the flashing ballerina's mercurial evanescence. We find him in the first ballet which history graces with the name (illus. p. 145). Later, he performed under Louis XIV, and a hundred years ago was loudly applauded for his patient balance, his solemn trunk and his rhythmical adagio foot-work. [56]

This paragraph introduces the readers to Cornell's section on elephants and to his exploration into the history of elephant performance and ballet.[57] Like the section on "Clowns," Cornell emphasizes historical legacy and tradition, asking readers to connect their contemporary experience of performing elephants back to the far reaches of Western history. Folded into this legacy however, is a critique of imperial power. The elephant often represents the exotic reaches of kingdoms from Ancient Rome to the British Empire.[58] Essentially a commodity from Africa or Asia, the elephant symbolizes the tamed power of the wild world beyond each Western country's civilized borders. Crucially, when trade brings the elephant into "civilization," the animal conforms to society's rules and etiquette, performing for aristocracy and adapting to each society's predilections. The elephant loses its wildness to perform in ballet, an art of rigid hierarchy. Cornell seeks to remind the readers that these elephant performances began with the creation of ballet. In "Elephants," Cornell brings together sources from the 16th,

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[56] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 136

[57] Ibid, pp. 143- 150.

[58] Cornell represents the Roman Empire with Broderip's text, the French through the four prints included in the section, the English through the excerpt from Hugues Roux's text and the broadside, and the American through the Marianne Moore essay and the photograph.

17th, 19th, and 20th centuries.[59] Dore Ashton describes this effect, referencing Cornell's other work for *Dance Index*:

> Cornell's knowledge of the history of nineteenth-century dance won him a job on *Dance Index*, where he was able to indulge his passion for collecting "ephemera" and memorabilia of the—or rather *his*—Golden Age…. Cornell gathered both contemporary texts and illustrations for his montage, a vivid reconstruction of the period.[60]

In this montage, organized roughly chronologically, each image and textual source emphasizes imperial power and orientalism, but Cornell also provides a less overt critique of the subjugation of the elephant in service of opulent pageantry and circus performances. Cornell builds a picture of the elephant as a willing, skilled servant. Following a chronological story of the soaring grandeur of the elephant's spectacle (culminating in George Balanchine's 1942 *Ballet des Elephants*) Cornell abruptly brings the section back to earth with a graphic description of one elephant's suffering. A brief note from Cornell's archive makes his thinking concerning the treatment of elephants clear: "A belief in the oriental deification of beasts is necessary to have more respect for the elephant than is indicated in treatment of the elephant for purposes of spectacle in Circus, motion picture, etc. [Sic]" [61] Explicitly, "Elephants" explores the tradition of

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[59] The sources proceed as follows: an excerpt Guillaume Du Bartas's 1578 work *La Semaine,* an anonymous print "Labrinthe Royal de L'Hercule" from 1600, Israel Silvestre's "Les Plaisirs de l'Isle Enchantée," 1664, an excerpt from W. J. Broderip's *Zoological* Recreations, 1849, crayon drawing by Toulouse-Lautrec, 1899, broadside advertisement from 1830, contemporary essay by Marianne Moore, photograph from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, 1942, and finally a translated excerpt from Hugues Roux's *Les Jeux du* Cirque, 1889. They are not exactly chronological, but do roughly proceed from older to more modern sources.

[60] Ashton, Dore, "Joseph Cornell," *A Joseph Cornell Album.* New York: The Viking Press, 1974, p. 25.

[61] "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

elephants performing for our entertainment with the ballet. More subtlety, the section explores the ways Western owners have treated such performing elephants.

Rome and Versailles: Early Elephant Ballet

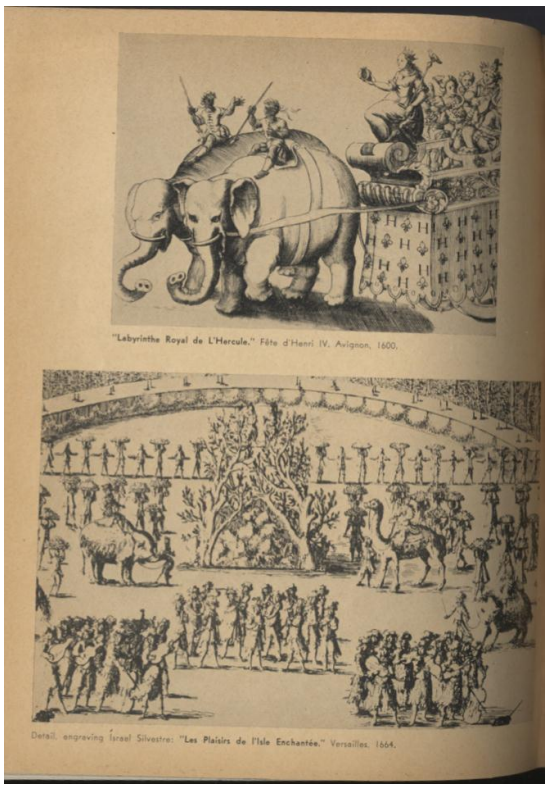

Illustration 10. 17th Century Prints with Elephants in Performance in Service of the French Crown. Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p.144.

In the pages following the "Elephants" cover page, Cornell includes early images of performing elephants alongside a narrative describing elephant performance in the Classical and Romantic period. The crowded images refer to the history of ballet and concert performance and their connection to royal patronage. These images cast the early ballet not as the regimented art form of the 20th century, but as a form dedicated to

pageantry and opulence. According to Cornell, the elephant was central to the beginning of ballet as art. Ballet itself was a display of power and pageantry

Among the many books written by editors and contributors to *Dance Index*, two are general histories of the ballet. Lincoln Kirstein's *The Book of the Dance* (1935) and Arnold L. Haskell's *Ballet Panorama: An Illustrated Chronicle of Three Centuries* (1938) both provide discussions of the birth of ballet.[62] Paul David Magriel, editor and founder of *Dance Index*, prepared a comprehensive bibliography of writings on dance (dedicated to Lincoln Kirstein), which includes numerous texts about the birth of ballet.[63] The community around *Dance Index* was educated in the particular history necessary to easily identify the early ballet referenced in each image. Populated by a performing aristocratic class, some semi-professional dancers, and the animals, these early ballets consisted mostly of poses rather than more elaborate modern technique. For Cornell, the performing elephants (and other exotic animals) depicted at the ballet referred to the monarchy's international power, while performing aristocracy referred to domestic power.[64] The elephant exemplified monarchical magnificence through its control and elegance.

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[62] Kirstein, Lincoln, *The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*.1935 reprinted 1943. Haskell, Arnold L., *Ballet Panorama: An Illustrated Chronicle of Three Centuries*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1938.

[63] Magriel, Paul David, *A Bibliography of Dancing: A List of Books and Articles on the Dance and Related Subjects*. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1936.

[64] Kirstein, Lincoln, "Feudal Pageantry and Danced Disguisings," "Renaissance Foundations for Court Ballet," "The *Ballet Comique* and the *Ballet de Cour*" and "The English Court Masque and the Academy of Lully," The Book of the Dance, pp.105-191. Haskell, Arnold L., "Ballet at Court," *Ballet Panorama,* pp. 9-13.

The top left image on page 144 depicts an elaborate chariot drawn by two massive elephants.[65] Two African figures ride the elephants, holding spears and gesturing to each other in their efforts to control the animals.[66] Together, they draw the chariot bearing a personification of France and several musicians. A cloth covered in fleurs-de-lis and the letter H for Henri IV drapes the chariot. Performers hired to praise the monarch's grandeur through their songs crowd the chariot. The elephants and Africans constitute part of this grandeur and represent the fact that the monarch's power extends all the way to Africa, and his emissaries bring the crème-de-la-crème of the continent's animal representatives back to his own land, simply to pull a ceremonial chariot in a parade.

Below this image of the chariot, hundreds of figures and several exotic animals populate a crowded 17th century print.[67] The artist, Israël Silvestre, posed the men and animals meticulously, each exactly spaced to maximize symmetry and harmony in the overall picture.[68] The image, which the caption identifies as a performance at Versailles, depicts one of the earliest ballets.[69] Although the ballet's stager might have woven in a loose narrative, these performances exhibited more than they performed. It was only with the professionalization of ballet, the foundation of the department of Dance in the Royal

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[65] Anonymous. Published by Jaques Bramereau. Illustration for *Labryrinthe royal de l'Hercvle gavlois triomphant,* ca. 1600. Copper engraving. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. The print Cornell reproduced came from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's print room.

[66] An enlarged image of the original makes it clear that these figures are meant to be Africans, with darker skin, dark, curly hair, and over-emphasized facial features. They are caricatures of blackness. The original image also shows the king and queen at the back of the chariot.

[67] Silvestre, Israël, *Les plaisirs de l'isle enchantée.* 1664. Print. Foundation for Landscape Studies. Cornell found this print at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's print room.

[68] Silvestre created a group of prints to commemorate celebrations at Versailles in 1664. His engravings concentrate on the pageant-like ballets performed for Louis XIV.

[69]Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 144.

Academy of Music in 1661, that the *ballet de cour* began to become an athletic pursuit.[70] The print shows this perfectly, as performers hold platters of goods on their heads while others gesture towards the display. Here, the collected aristocracy presents the wealth of the nation to the king, whom the un-cropped image represents observing the scene from a raised platform at the front and center of the performance. Exotic animals are prominently displayed towards the center of the arrayed masses. Attendants guard an elephant, a camel, and a bear.[71] The setting, Versailles, connects this performance intimately to monarchical display of power. This performance was by and for the king and the aristocracy, not the public. The king surveyed his "enchanted isle," and his court enjoyed it only because of his largess.[72] Such was the power of the king that he could build a capital where there was none, build an island on land, and bring elephants out of Africa for an afternoon performance.

On the facing page, Cornell includes a long excerpt from W. J. Broderip's *Zoological Recreations* (1849) spanning nearly a page and a half.[73] The text describes the Roman Empire's use of elephants as entertainment, and Broderip connects these symbols of Roman Imperial strength to contemporary performances, discussing his own

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[70] Kirstein, Lincoln, *The Book of the Dance*, p. 185.

[71] Silvestre rendered the elephant and camel quite clearly. The bear might also be a rhinoceros, or some other large, four-legged animal

[72] The text accompanying the uncropped print says the following, "Comparse des quatre saisons, avec leur suitte de concertans, et porteurs de presens, et la Machine de Pan, et de Diane avec leur suitte de concertans, et de bergers portans les plats pendant le recit 'des uns et des autres deuant le Roy, et les Reynes. (sic)" "Premiere Journée." It is titled « Les Plaisirs de l'Isle Enchantée, ou, Les festes et divertissements du roy á Versailles : divisez en trois journées et commencez le 7me. jour de may de l'année 1664. (sic) » Cornell gives the title simply as « Les Plaisirs de l'Isle Enchantée. »
Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 144.

[73] Cornell mistakenly cites Broderip as "Broderlip." Broderip, W. J., "Elephants: Part I," "Elephants: Part II," "Elephants; Part III," Zoological *Recreations*. London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1847, pp. 252- 299. Cornell's excerpt comes from pp. 252, 296-298.

audience's amazement at performing elephants. This text serves as a bridge from the ancient (both the *ancien régime* and the ancient world) to the modern (both the 19th and 20th centuries). Broderip's text also describes Imperial Roman elephants in costumed performance: "Six gentleman-elephants, clad in the *toga*, accompanied as many lady guests of the same quality, dressed in the *stola*, to the banqueting-room, and there they went through the ceremonies of the *triclinium* after the most approved fashion."[74] Here the elephants act like humans, engaged in a sort of mimicry of the upper classes. The elephants impress their audience with their ability to follow the rules of etiquette with elegance. Early ballet capitalized on this insistence on etiquette.[75] Thus, the elephant's mastery of manners mimics an early step towards the student's mastery of dance. These Roman elephants perform, unlike their seventeenth century counterparts. Through this text, Cornell represents the transition from elephants as part of a balletic display to elephants as the central performers in a theater.

Broderip goes on to describe these more traditional dance performances by elephants. He does so with a tone of amazement, surprised by the elephant's athletic and artistic abilities, He also includes his own historical quotation on performing elephants, an excerpt from Edward Topsell's 1607 work *The historie of fovre-footed beastes:*

> Their dancing at last was carried to a high pitch of refinement, for "they learned to daunce after pipes by measure, sometime dauncing softly, sometime apace, and then again leaping upright, according to the number of the thing, sung or played upon the instrument. There was an elephant playing upon a cymbal, and others of his fellowes dauncing about him, for there was fastened to either of both of his

[74] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 145.
[75] As discussed extensively by Kirstein, Haskell, and many other authors, early ballet was an expression of aristocracy, bound up with feudal pageantry and thus complex rules of etiquette.

> fore-legs one cymbal, and another hanged to his trunke, the beast would observe just time, and strike upon one and then the other, to the admiration of all the beholders." [Sic][76]

Topsell describes amazement at the elephants' skill, their ability to keep "just time" and dance both slowly and quickly.[77] From this description, Broderip proceeds into a description of performances during his own time. An elephant called Madame Sacqui, he says, eclipsed "all the feats of ancient and modern times."[78] He describes this performer as a funambulist, a tightrope walker. (This brief discussion helps explain Cornell's inclusion of a tiny illustration of ropewalker Blondin on the last page of the Elephant's section.) An impressive show of dexterity, this elephant performed a feat difficult even for the much lighter and surefooted human. Broderip's text concludes by connecting elephant performance to those great imperial showmen of the ancient past, the Roman Emperors: "In Nero's time, at the celebration of the *Ludi maximi,* a distinguished Roman knight descended the rope, seated on an elephant, and, at the Floral Games, Galba exhibited rope-dancing elephants."[79]

Directly beneath Broderip's text, Toulouse-Lautrec's crayon drawing "*Elephant en Liberte*" (1899) takes up three quarters of the page.[80] The artist's delicate crayon

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[76] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 145.

[77] Broderip's original text reveals that this quotation comes from Topsell. He presumably refers to Edward Topsell's 1607 work *The historie of fovre-footed beastes*, but includes no details other than the one word "Topsell" in a footnote, which he references another seven times. Topsell, Edward, *The historie of fovre-footed beastes* London: W. Laggard, 1607. Broderip, W. J., "Elephants; Part III," *Zoological Recreations.* London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1847, p. 298.

[78] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 145.

[79] Ibid, p. 146.

[80] A hand-written note on the back of Cornell's reproduction of this work says the following: "034 42, Toulouse-Lautrec, elephant, crayon drawing. Collection Mrs. Murray Danforth." The print likely came from the Rhode Island School of Design. Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri de, *Elephant en liberte,* 1899. From « Au cirque : vingt-deux dessins aux crayons de couleur. »

strokes stand out, manifestly hand drawn on the page. An androgynous figure brandishes a whip towards a performing elephant. A line of bows down the figure's right leg emphasizes the pants' tightness, which in turn emphasizes the figure's womanly curves. The elephant and trainer mirror each other in posture, each leaning slightly away from the other, and each raising an appendage towards the other. The elephant is surprisingly small, barely larger than the trainer, despite the overturned barrel it stands on. The slight arc of a circus ring connects the trainer's raised arm to the elephant's raised trunk and head. In the grayscale of the magazine reproduction, some of the differences between the trainer and elephant disappear.

With this image, Cornell includes the second of three nods to canonical modernist high art. In a magazine that could easily have consisted only of modernist work devoted to the circus, the inclusion reminds the readers of Cornell's choices. Toulouse-Lautrec's drawing holds equal space and importance as popular 19th century advertisements, novelty prints, and documentary photographs, and slightly less space even than an industrially produced broadside across the page line.[81]

[81] The page is a reproduction of a broadside advertisement for a performance of "Elephant of Siam" on June 14, 1830 in Liverpool.

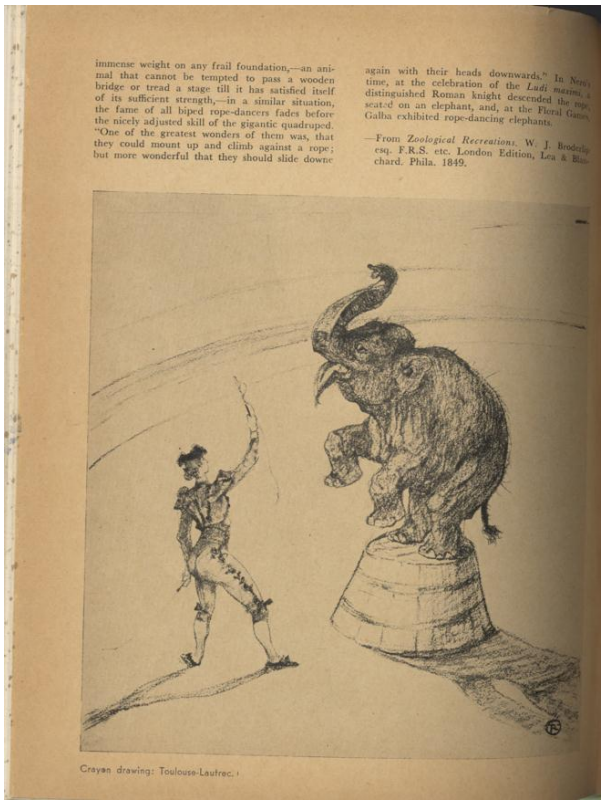

Illustration 11. Excerpt from W. J. Broderip's *Zoological* Recreations (1846) and Cropped reproduction of Toulouse-Lautrec's "Elephant en Liberte," (1899) Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 146.

Such is Cornell's leveling impulse. He acknowledges the French modernist genre of work dealing with the circus at the same time as he chooses not to focus on it. Cornell includes Toulouse-Lautrec's drawing not to provide an example of an important artist using the circus as subject matter (although the drawing certainly does this), but to provide an illustration of a larger performing tradition Perhaps this is why Cornell includes this particular work and not a more well-known image by Toulouse-Lautrec dealing with the circus. Something better known might emphasize the visual artist over

the performing artist, throwing off Cornell's carefully built exploration. Cornell focuses on the performing elephants, not the artists and intellectuals depicting those animals.

Together, Broderip's text and the four images next to it pull the readers into the past, through the 19th century British Empire into distant, ancient times in Greece and Rome. Empires not only controlled "wild Africa," but also assumed that they civilized it. The elephant, the most human of animals, was still an animal. And it was a mark of the gentility of the monarchy that through sheer force of will, the elephant could become as disciplined and graceful as a ballerina. Although as readers we do not experience the performance, the images and descriptions evidence the once real pageant. Cornell asks us to imagine these ancient performances by comparing them to contemporary experiences, as Broderip does in his excerpt. Just as he transitions smoothly from 1st to 19th century performances, readers draw together contemporary elephant performances with the ancient, connecting past to present through image and text. Cornell makes this connection easier by including contemporary text and image later in his "Elephants" section.

Vanessa and Modoc[82]

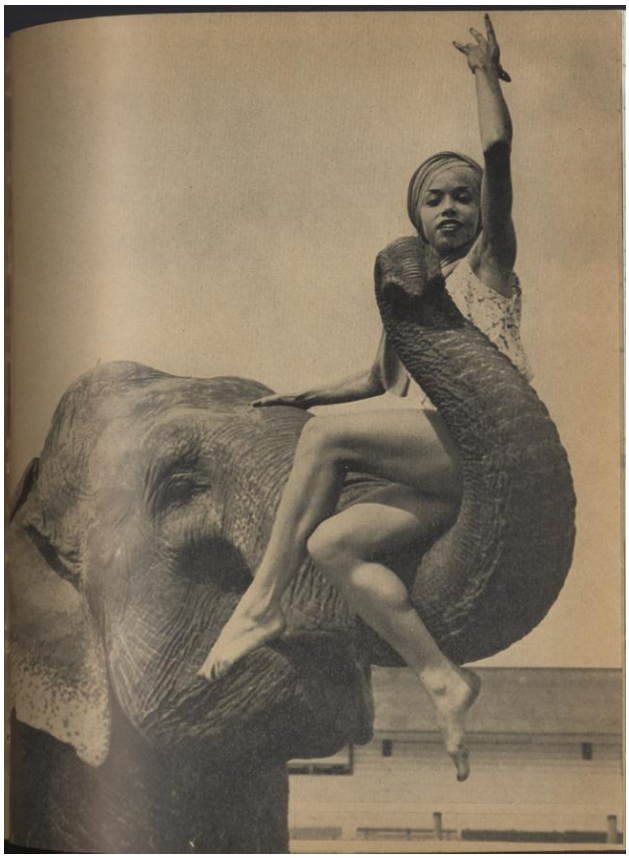

Illustration 12. Photograph of "Vanessa" and Modoc, from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus 1942 season. Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 149.

After two text-only pages, the photograph of a woman on an elephant starkly breaks the rhythm of the issue.[83] The arresting photograph depicts a young woman posed

[82] For an analysis of these two pages, please see Ellen Levy's book *Criminal ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the struggle between the arts* and Dickran Tashjian's *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire*. Levy explores Cornell and Moore through their relationship and incorporates an analysis of the elephant in Moore's poetic oeuvre. She also explores "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" as an expression of gender and sexual identity, particularly sexual ambivalence. This is not my project, and I have purposely avoided applying Cornell's biography to this thesis beyond the textual evidence he left to posterity in his archive. Tashjian, too, discusses the pages in context of the relationship between Cornell and Moore.
Levy, Ellen, *Criminal ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashberry, and the struggle between the arts*., pp. 77-91.
Tashjian, Dickran, *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire*. Pp. 72-77

sitting on an elephant's trunk. The woman holds her left arm aloft, mimicking the gesture of the elephant's trunk. Her legs cross elegantly, dangling just below the elephant's trunk. The young woman's smooth skin contrasts with the elephant's wrinkled, leathery hide, but the two beings unite through their expressive gestures. Both pose for the camera, aware of their audience. The young woman stares at the viewer, seemingly proud of her stature on top of the elephant. Her elegance and self-assurance are clear; she is a performer. The caption on the back of the original photograph in Cornell's archive indicates that she is "Vanessa, Hindu girl who did the ballet with the elephants in the center ring."[84] This Vanessa is clearly not a typical Western European ballerina, although it is impossible to know her cultural identity without more information.[85] Her skin color, the turban she wears, and her resolutely bare legs emphasize her exoticism. This performer is comfortable barefoot and bare-legged, balancing on an elephant, confident in front of the camera.

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[83] This single photographic image of an elephant recalls Cornell's inclusion of footage of performing elephants in his film *Carousel: Animal Opera*. Dated around 1940, but not exhibited until much later with edits by Larry Jordan, the film includes two elephants wearing elaborate costumes and turning a giant handle.

[84] "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[85] Unfortunately, I have not been able to securely identify "Vanessa." There is one Vanessa listed in the Ringling Bros 1942 roster, a Vanessa Keystein. I have found no other mention of her. There is no Vanessa listed in the Balanchine archives for that period. According to The George Balanchine Foundation, "Performed for one season, April-November 1942, 425 performances. On opening night, for an Armed Forces benefit, Vera Zorina rode atop Modoc into the center ring and, before the Stravinsky ballet began, performed an improvised routine with the elephant… In *Circus Polka* three girls atop elephants occupied the three rings, with other dancers on platforms between them… The corps de ballet was drawn from "'The North Starlets,' young women of the aerial, ground, and equestrian ensembles, supplemented by dancers hired by Balanchine for the New York performances." "202. The Ballet of the Elephants," http://balanchine.org/balanchine/display_result.jsp?num=202, Accessed February 2012. The woman pictured does not appear to be Vera Zorina, who had a fairer complexion than that of the woman in the photograph. "Vanessa," then, must be one of the nameless "young women" mentioned by the Balanchine Foundation.

Cornell reversed the original image so that both trunk and arm serve as framing devices, pointing the readers towards the text on the other side. An essay entitled "Ballet des Elephants" written by Marianne Moore serves as a caption for the photograph. The photograph points back to the text, and the text refers to the photograph. The title immediately points the readers to the image as an example of that ballet. In Moore's first paragraph, the readers learn the identity of ballerina and elephant as well as the basic information behind the photograph. This image, she tells us, is of Vanessa, "a Hindoo premiere ballerina [Sic]" and Modoc the elephant. According to Moore, together they performed in the center ring during Balanchine's collaboration with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus in 1942.

Although the details might have been unfamiliar, many of the magazine's original readers would have been aware of Balanchine's collaboration with Stravinsky and the circus because the performance received significant press coverage and promotion by the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Balanchine, a recognized star choreographer of ballet in America (*Dance Index* dedicated its February-March 1945 issue to Balanchine), lowered himself to choreograph a routine for tutu-clad elephants. A 1942 New York Times review of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey opening points to the popularity of performing pachyderms:

> George Balanchine and Igor Stravinsky have collaborated on the "choreographic tour de force" of an elephant ballet by hanging some silly skirts on the noble beasts and writing some new dissonances for the brass band. But don't worry: it is

> still an act of performing elephants, and the skirts and the girls do not ruin it much.[86]

As annoyed as this reviewer seems by the balletic intervention into a "good, fundamental circus," Cornell carefully points out through his inclusion of early texts and images in "Elephants" that elephants have always been involved with the ballet.[87] The apparent newness of the collaboration was due to a lapse in historical memory.

As readers follow Moore's text, her writing transitions into a poetic description of the performance.

> An elephant is graceful when doing things it could do if not taught to do them, and it is enhanced by a skirt as the grace of a venerable live oak would be enhanced by a skirt. And although as actors or workers, "in ring or in harness," of the sixteen hundred troupers in the circus, "the most obliging and even-tempered creatures on the lot" are said to be the elephants…. Their deliberate way of kneeling, on slowsliding forelegs—like a cat's yawning stretch or a ship's slide into the water—is fine ballet; the pageant of fifty elephants with lights dimmed for the closing feature gave an effect of rocks with traces of snow in the fissures that, with the overwhelming sameness of the all-pink whirling nymphs and their fifty rigid garlands, become a gigantically perfect monotone. The garlands—of apple-blossoms or wild roses—were presently laid aside and if memory does not deceive me, each nymph, with an elephant as partner, made a stair of the elephant's knee, pulling hard on the ear to gain the summit, and sat—arm lifted—on the bandeau worn by the elephant.[88]

Here the readers learn that Moore saw the circus-ballet in question and relied on her memories to describe the performance, presumably cued by the photograph Cornell provided.[89] Moore adds color to the image, telling us that the elephants appeared as

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[86] Atkinson, Brooks "Going to the Circus: Pandemonium and Elephants Prevail in the Modernized Ringling Show," *New York Times*. Apr. 19, 1942, p. X1. "Choreographic tour de force" is the language used on the Ringling promotional materials to describe Balanchine's work in 1942.

[87] Ibid

[88] Moore, Marianne, "Ballet des Elephants," "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas," p. 148.

[89] I have not been able to find the photograph of Vanessa and Modoc elsewhere. I believe Cornell received it, along with several other photographs, in a press packet from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey

monotone rocks next to the pink of the ballerinas. Moore nods towards the image, describing "each nymph" aloft on the elephant with "arm lifted." The emphasis added by Moore's punctuation around those two words "—arm lifted—" points towards the purposeful interplay between text and image. We then compare lifted arm with "arm lifted," the readers' eye bouncing from image to text and back again. Here Cornell asks readers to be attentive to each source's context, as he does throughout the magazine. Each page is incomplete without that next to it. Vanessa and Modoc are anonymous without Moore's essay.

Moore's description continues as she specifically addresses the photograph. She draws attention to both figures' exoticism, discussing Vanessa's "Javanese" dancing. Moore implies that Vanessa's confidence comes from her Eastern roots, her innate genetic understanding of the animal. As we read this description and look directly across the page towards the text, we see Vanessa's pointed, balletic feet and the elephant's open mouth. Vanessa's visible training in the Western traditions of ballet contrast with Moore's exoticizing language. Modoc's massiveness is striking. He could destroy the delicate dancer.

Although less historically loaded than many of the other pages within "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas," these two facing pages of the "Ballet des Elephants" represent a typical text-image dialogue. Cornell's work for *Dance Index* incorporates more text

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Circus. The photographs are accompanied by text clearly written by the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Their language is promotional. Cornell was apparently only interested in the photographs. "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

than much of his other collage work, but it displays the same sensitivity to the relationship between the readers' experience of both text and image. It asks the readers to read *both* intently and let each enhance the meaning of the other. In this way, these two pages are representative of the issue as a whole. Each paragraph of text supports the imagery on the page and each page challenges and supports its facing page.

The Nature of the Beast

Directly following Vanessa and Modoc, an excerpt from Hugues Roux's *Les Jeux du Cirque* (1889) describes the violent treatment of one performing elephant. This shift from light description and images of performers to discussions of cruelty and pain draws attention to Cornell's engagement with political and social issues. Here we see how service to the empire can result in awful torture as much as opulent grandeur. Cornell's translation of an excerpt of Roux's French text calls attention to the darker side of elephant performance.[90] In addition to a description of an elephant called Chung's torture, we read of an elephant's magnanimity towards his fellow elephants. This makes the suffering even more wrenching. Cornell's excerpt suggests that with only a little respect, gentle, giant elephants perform willingly.

[90]Roux, Hugues, *Le Jeux du Cirque et la Vie Foraine*. Paris: Plon, Nourrit, et Cie, 1889, pp. 89-93.

Roux describes two elephants facing a severe drought, and their behavior exemplifies the elephant's "exalted sense of duty and dignified self-respect."[91] Cornell's translation describes the situation in simple, blunt language.[92]

> At the siege of Bhurtpore, after a long delay by the British before the walls of the town, a season of dry winds had exhausted the reservoirs and competition was very keen around the last wells which held water. One day, two drivers found themselves by the wells with their elephants; one of the beasts, who was a very remarkable size, seeing his comrade make use of a pail to draw water, seized it from him by force. During all this the two guardians noticed nothing wrong, while the victim, conscious of the affront, held his resentment. But when the thief leaned on the edge of the well to reach the water, the smaller elephant found enormous strength, launched himself with lowered head against his enemy, and pushed him into the cistern.[93]

Described here as a just punishment for a crime done, one elephant pushes the other into the well. In this context, elephants are so human as to demand justice and retribution from those who wrong them.

This brief parable of thirsty elephants precedes a more disturbing story of Chung the elephant. Brought from the far reaches of the Empire to perform in England, Chung's handlers stabbed him in the ear in order to force him to cross a bridge that the elephant did not trust. Scheduled to perform in a Harlequin pantomime, the proprietors called in the captain of the ship that had transported Chung to England. Because the captain had been kind to the elephant, he was able to console Chung with treats and kind words. The elephant, too, communicated with the captain:

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[91] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 150.
[92] Although I do not have absolute proof that Cornell translated the excerpt, I have not been able to find an English translation of the work available at the time of publication.
[93] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 150.

> Hardly had the elephant recognized his friend, than he approached [the captain] with a suppliant air, took his hand gently in his trunk and plunged it into his bloody wound, then brought it out in front of the captain's eyes. The gesture said as clearly as words: See how they've made me suffer.[94]

Roux contrasts the kindness of the captain and the cruelty of the trainer. Recalling the allegorical description of the elephant's qualities from the first page of the section, the elephant does not forget. Chung refused to take food from the trainer even after the end of his torture.

Cornell's inclusion of this page of text seems disjointed. The inset image of a print seems to belong to a different narrative, too. Blondin (the famous funambulist who crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope) shepherds a festively attired elephant across a low tightrope. The elephant seems to step confidently, unconcerned about the possibility of falling or the rope breaking. Roughly contemporary to Roux's text, the image paints a much rosier picture of the performing elephant. The elephant's plumed and tasseled headdress, decorative belt, and Blondin's classic Pierrot-like costume all lend the scene levity. Blondin holds a whip, but it rests still at his side, just grazing the ground. It is clear that this elephant received significant training in order to execute his rope dance. Unlike Chung, this elephant's trainer treated it kindly.

Unlike much of the rest of the magazine issue, here text and image seem dissonant. Roux's disturbing text distinctly breaks with the rest of the chapter's narrative, while the image fits nicely with the others. Or so, at first glance, it would seem. In each image, except that of Vanessa and Modoc, a spear or whip implies the possibility of

[94] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 150.

violence to control the elephant. The force is always just that: implied. It is not evident in text or image except for this final text. Roux's text asks readers to look back at each image and to notice the spears and whips, to make the mental leap from presence to use. Perhaps, then, these elephants are not altogether willingly performing for the empire. Perhaps, in fact, the Asian and African sources of these elephants are not altogether willing members of the Empire.

Cornell subtly casts a shadow onto the grand history of performing elephants he built over seven pages of texts and images. Each image takes on renewed significance as part of the history of Western oppression of other cultures. We can see the elephants as both wise emissaries adept at performance and oppressed slaves silently suffering. A seemingly benign image with a happily performing elephant is also slightly menacing, slightly threatening, when readers focus on the whip. Such is the complexity of Cornell's work, folding together disparate sources to build new meanings into each. Perhaps the torture is not as bad as Chung's story might have us believe. Perhaps it is not as benign as Modoc's photograph seems to imply. Cornell's "Elephants" section asks the readers to recognize both possibilities and to allow for such duality.

Chapter 3- Ballerinas

> The Equestrienne, a bareback cousin of Taglioni, Pavlova and Markova—floats about her ring in an endless circle of anonymity, her supreme gymnastics often transcended by her touching grace—adored by crowds, children and a few artists—Balzac, Seurat, Picasso—who have caught her curious and special skill as a symbol of the combination of human and animal elegance, which the Greeks knew in centaurs. Horses paw primly as dancers, and the bareback ladies are often as strong as horses.[95]

Athleticism and elegance, beast and beauty; for Cornell, the equine "ballerina" enables the balanced combination of apparently mutually exclusive properties. She is not an equestrian, but an equestrienne, explicitly feminine. By combining "human and animal elegance," the circus ballerina performs the seemingly impossible. She executes an arabesque on top of a horse at full gallop. She balances gracefully at great speed, offering "supreme gymnastics often transcended by her touching grace." Gymnastics implies athleticism, great feats of strength. Yet she maintains her femininity through her costume (the tutu) and her balletic gesture. Her performance partner, the horse, also balances strength and grace. The horse's long, delicate legs contrast with its large muscles and raw power. Just as in the "Clowns" section, this section is not truly about ballerinas, but about the equestrienne performers at the circus. And like "Elephants," "Ballerinas" explores the animal and the human and the way those two worlds clash and come together.

For Cornell, this fusion of human and animal also relates to a child's first experiences with more exalted art forms. In a page in his notes Cornell states, "the lady

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[95] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 136.
"Ballerinas" is the shortest of the three sections, spanning page 151 to page 155. It also includes the fewest sources, only one text and five images.

jumping through the hoop is one's first taste of a ballerina in a tutu."[96] American children all across the country could experience a "taste of a ballerina" through the performances of the riders in the circus ring. This idea is significant because of the rarity of true ballet performances in the United States during this period. The first truly professional ballet company was not founded in the United States until the 1930s. Touring ballet companies would not make it to the small towns that the many touring circuses would visit following the railroads.[97] Thus, the equestrienne might not only be "one's first taste of a ballerina in a tutu," but also their only experience of such a live, dance-related performance. Cornell's first taste of ballerinas takes on added significance in light of the many works in his larger oeuvre dealing with ballet stars.

Cornell renders the sawdust ballerina anonymous, unlike her concert stage "cousins." He lists some of the most famous ballerinas of the Romantic age "Taglioni, Pavlova, and Markova." In this way, he connects the equestriennes to the Romantic period, just as he did with "Clowns" and "Elephants." He goes on to connect the experience of viewing the woman on horseback to that of the centaur in ancient Greece. Just as in the clown section, contemporary performers represent a link to performers from both the near and distant past. In his opening paragraph, he connects this tradition of performance to the modern age, referring to great modernist masters who worked with the equestrienne theme ("Balzac, Seurat, Picasso").

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[96] "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[97] The San Francisco Ballet was founded in 1933, "the oldest professional ballet company in America." "History," *San Francisco Ballet*. http://www.sfballet.org/about/history, 2011. Kirstein, Lincoln, "Dancing in North America: 1519-1942," *The Book of the Dance*, 1935 reprinted 1942, pp. 328-358. Haskell, Arnold L., *Ballet Russe: The Age of Diaghilev*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968.

On the same page of notes in his archive, Cornell teases out further his interest in the bareback performances as an entryway into ballet. "The ballet makes demands upon us. We must enter into its world of make believe… with great mental effort to participate fully. The happenings in the sawdust ring require no such effort."[98] Bareback performances do not contain the narrative complexity of classical ballet. They present pure spectacle, amazing feats of strength and agility, but little in the way of complex concept-driven story. Perhaps a gifted equestrienne may craft her performance in the same way a ballerina does, but there are no great equestrienne choreographers, no Balanchines or Petipas. Thus, Cornell's ballerinas both perform and create, without the guidance of an authoritative male figure.

These riding ballerinas, balancing strength and grace, were not only an early entrance into ballet for the American child, but "symbolic of life, poised [despite] danger, daring."[99] The ballerina performs with the horse, a very real danger to her person. Her only job is to make her performance appear graceful and easy despite that danger. She makes the impossible appear possible. In the same note, Cornell writes that "an event, tho[ough] ethereal, is none the less real."[100] The equestrienne's ethereal show—her supreme balance on top of her equine companion—looks like a trick, a special effect. It is not an illusion, not a Hollywood fiction. The event, despite its near impossible difficulty, "is none the less real." The audience has no need to suspend disbelief; the equestrienne's unbelievable performance is an actual, physical reality.

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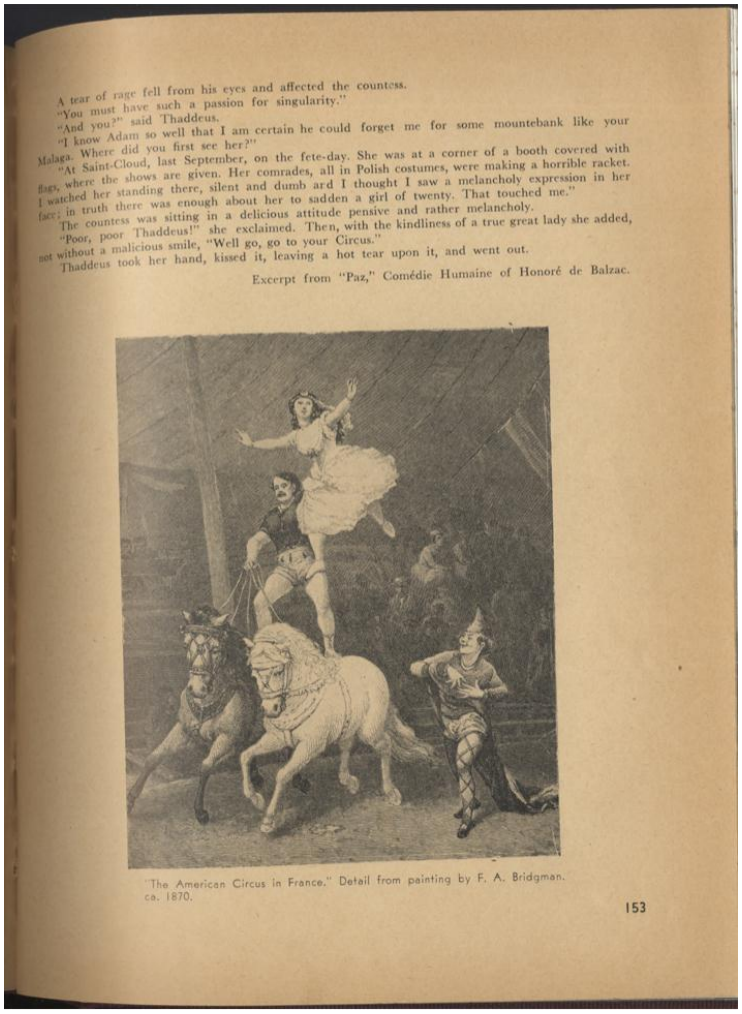
[98] "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[99] Ibid
[100] Ibid

“Goddess of Gymnastics”



A tear of rage fell from his eyes and affected the countess.
"You must have such a passion for singularity."
"And you?" said Thaddeus.
"I know Adam so well that I am certain he could forget me for some mountebank like your Malaga. Where did you first see her?"
"At Saint-Cloud, last September, on the fete-day. She was at a corner of a booth covered with flags, where the shows are given. Her comrades, all in Polish costumes, were making a horrible racket. I watched her standing there, silent and dumb ard I thought I saw a melancholy expression in her face; in truth there was enough about her to sadden a girl of twenty. That touched me."
The countess was sitting in a delicious attitude pensive and rather melancholy.
"Poor, poor Thaddeus!" she exclaimed. Then, with the kindliness of a true great lady she added, not without a malicious smile, "Well go, go to your Circus."
Thaddeus took her hand, kissed it, leaving a hot tear upon it, and went out.

Excerpt from "Paz," Comédie Humaine of Honoré de Balzac.

"The American Circus in France." Detail from painting by F. A. Bridgman. ca. 1870.

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Illustration 13. Excerpt from Honore de Balzac’s “Paz” and cropped reproduction of “The American Circus in France” by F. A. Bridgman, ca. 1870. Cornell, Joseph, “Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,” *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 153.

In the section’s most realistic portrayal of equestrian performers, a woman balances with the help of a man. Two fully bridled horses gallop around the circus ring. The man clings tightly to both horses’ bridles, bending his knees as he keeps one foot on each horse. The woman balances with her right foot planted on the man’s upper thigh.

His left arm helps support her balance as she extends her left leg back into an arabesque and both arms stretch out towards the watching crowds. She wears a flowing, light colored dress to her knees, decorated with ruffles around the neck and arms. Her dark, long hair flows around her shoulders, offset by a lightly colored headdress with a crescent shaped detail on her forehead. He wears a dark short-sleeved collared shirt and light shorts. His shorts highlight his muscular legs. His face betrays his physical effort, as he grits his teeth and clenches the bridles.

The two horses, one light and one dark, wear elaborate bridles to match their coats. Each gallops fully, all four hooves off the grounds. Perilously close to the galloping horses, a clown clutches his heart and leans away in mock amazement. He wears harlequin tights, shorts, a long cape, and a pointed hat. Exaggerated makeup covers his impish face. He is a brief glimpse of Cornell's earlier explorations in "Clowns." The fabric of a tent stretches above all five figures, the panels drooping low over the audience and high over the performers, supported by long vertical poles. A shadowy audience observes the spectacle, barely visibly seated on bleachers around the ring.

This "American Circus in France" illustrates Cornell's excerpt from Balzac succinctly.[101] Cornell includes nearly two pages of text from Honoré de Balzac's *Comedie de Humaine*. From the chapter variously titled "Paz" or "The Imaginary Mistress," Cornell includes the moment when the Comte Paz invents this imaginary

[101] Cornell includes an extended excerpt from Balzac's "Paz."
Balzac, Honoré, trans. Catherine Prescott Wormeley, "Paz," *The Comedy of Human Life*. Cour de France edition. Boston: Hardy, Pratt, 1904, pp. 229-332.

mistress.[102] "The thought of an heroic falsehood had come into his head."[103] In the passage, Paz describes a fictitious love to the woman he truly loves, Clementine, in order to hide his true feelings from her. He tells Clementine that he must go to the circus on Champ Elysees to see the bareback rider (sometimes translated as "ballet-girl"[104]) whom he fell in love with at first sight. Paz describes his imaginary love Malaga physically: "strong, active, and supple." She wears "a white tunic with a gold edge, and knitted silk bodice that makes her look like a living Greek statue."[105] Beautiful, but also "strong," Malaga looks "like a Greek statue." Here, she embodies many of the themes Cornell discussed in his opening paragraph.

Illustration 14. Flying Ballerina, Joseph Cornell with effects added by Larry Jordan, Still from *Cotillion*. c. 1938, effects added 1965-68.

[102] Various translators translate the title of the story by Balzac as Paz, The Imaginary Mistress, or The Faux Mistress. Cornell, following Wormeley's translation, credits the chapter as "Paz." "The Imaginary Mistress" better brings to mind the intricacies of fantasy and reality that Balzac deals with in his story and that Cornell includes in "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas."
[103] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 152.
[104] Ibid, p. 152.
[105] Ibid, p. 152.

Paz goes on to narrate her performance, using both normal and outlandish equine tricks to prove Malaga's dexterity:

> Such agility, such grace under constant danger seems to me the height of triumph for a woman. Yes, madame, Cinti and Malibran, Grisi and Taglioni, Pasta and Ellsler, all who reign or have reigned on the stage, can't be compared, to my mind, with Malaga, who can jump on or off a horse at full gallop, or stand on the point of one foot and fall easily into the saddle and knit stockings, break eggs, and make an omelette with the horse at full speed…. [Sic][106]

Balzac connects Paz's Malaga to the famous ballerinas and opera singers of his age. Malaga impresses Paz more than those illustrious names because of her amazing feats in the ring. His description starts with rather normal tricks for an equestrienne. She "can jump on or off a horse at full gallop, or stand on the point of one foot and fall easily into the saddle." These are the tricks that the images in the chapter illustrate. On the previous page, we see a woman "stand on the point of one foot" on the horse. On the facing page we can see a woman in a similar pose, modified only by the inclusion of a man supporting her. Paz goes on to narrate increasingly ridiculous activities. Malaga "make[s] an omelette with the horse at full speed." Beyond her physical capabilities, she is intelligent, amusing, and healthy. Every bit the fantasy, Malaga does more than is possible. Yet so do the true circus ballerinas. Cornell's film *Cotillion* (c. 1938) includes extended clips of a woman appearing to hang by her teeth as she spins, swings, and gestures with balletic grace.[107] The film incorporates children's activities of all sorts, with a focus on circus and vaudeville acts. *Cotillion* includes a funambulist executing perfect

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[106] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 152.
[107] Cornell, Joseph, *Cotillion*. ca. 1938, with edits by Larry Jordan, ca. 1965-68. 8 minutes. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrwgUe6k6YA

changement while balanced on her rope. Balzac's fantastic story seems less imaginary in context of the true performances explored by Cornell in other works.

In Balzac's chapter, Paz's fantasy becomes real. He meets the woman from the poster on which he based his story and begins to support her as though she were his mistress. She truly does complete near-impossible feats in the circus ring. But she is not the fantasy; she is flesh and blood. Balzac's chapter never again describes her performance, but engages with Paz, Clementine, and Malaga's relationships together, their human interactions. The fantastical performance that Paz describes remains a fantasy. By extension, all of the women presented in the section are fantasies. This "girl of twenty" performs amazing shows and attracts many admirers.[108] But her best supporter, the patron who pays for her apartment, does so based entirely on his imagined experiences of her performance. That imagination is sparked by an image, a poster advertising Malaga's performance. Just like the several images of equestriennes that Cornell includes, the image itself is enough to provoke a memory of a fantastical performance. In the readers' imagination, the performance becomes even more fantastic, more impossible. The performer's tricks become fanciful, but their character remains the same. Malaga is just as graceful in her imagined performance and particularly feminine. She cooks while on horseback, a strange fantasy.

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[108] "'I know Adam so well that I am certain he could forget me for some mountebank like your Malaga. Where did you first see her?' 'At Saint-Cloud, last September, on the fete-day. She was at a corner of a booth covered with flags, where the shows are given. Her comrades, all in Polish costumes, were making a horrible racket. I watched her standing there, silent and dumb I thought I saw a melancholy expression in her face; in truth there was enough about her to sadden a girl of twenty. That touched me.'" Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 153.

It is important that the image illustrating Balzac's story is the only one in the section that includes a man. This equestrienne does not perform alone, but with the help of a man. Just as Paz supports Malaga in Balzac's chapter, so too does the man support the equestrienne. They ride around the ring, performing together, just as Paz performs with Malaga for Clementine. The man is spectator in the form of Paz and the supporter in the image. Malaga is both a man's fantasy and reality. She is an object of sexual attention, but her admirers never consummate their relationships. Men display for us both Malaga and the equestrienne pictured in the accompanying print. Different men (Malaga's fans and the clown in the print, respectively) admire them in a way that their supporters seem not to.

Cornell identified the illustration as "'The American Circus in France.' Detail from a painting by F. A. Bridgman. ca. 1870."[109] Cornell chose a cropped image that focuses on the riders and the single clown. The full work includes another clown, a ringmaster figure, and a much more prominent crowd. By shifting the work's focus, the image becomes more like an audience member's experience of a performance. The spectacle of the performance overshadows the details surrounding it. The readers can ignore the rest of the audience and the less interesting performers in the ring.

At the Circus

Two figures balance together on a large horse. The figures are delicately drawn, their outlines traced gently but without many details. In the reproduction on the *Dance Index*

[109] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 153.

page, the figures are androgynous; only a few wisps of hair identifying them as women. (Better reproductions reveal both women to have long, flowing locks.) The woman closer to the magazine's readers balances on the tip of her right toe, extending her left leg into a low arabesque. She twists backwards, extending both arms above her head, tilting her head away from the horse. Small strokes indicate the creases in the figure's back, emphasizing its twisting and bending motion. Her partner supports the small of her back, allowing for a deeper bend. The second woman, too, balances on her right leg. A very faint outline of a second left leg extends between the front woman's right and left legs. The farther woman lifts her face towards her uplifted left arm. Together they ride the horse, floating impossibly and elegantly.

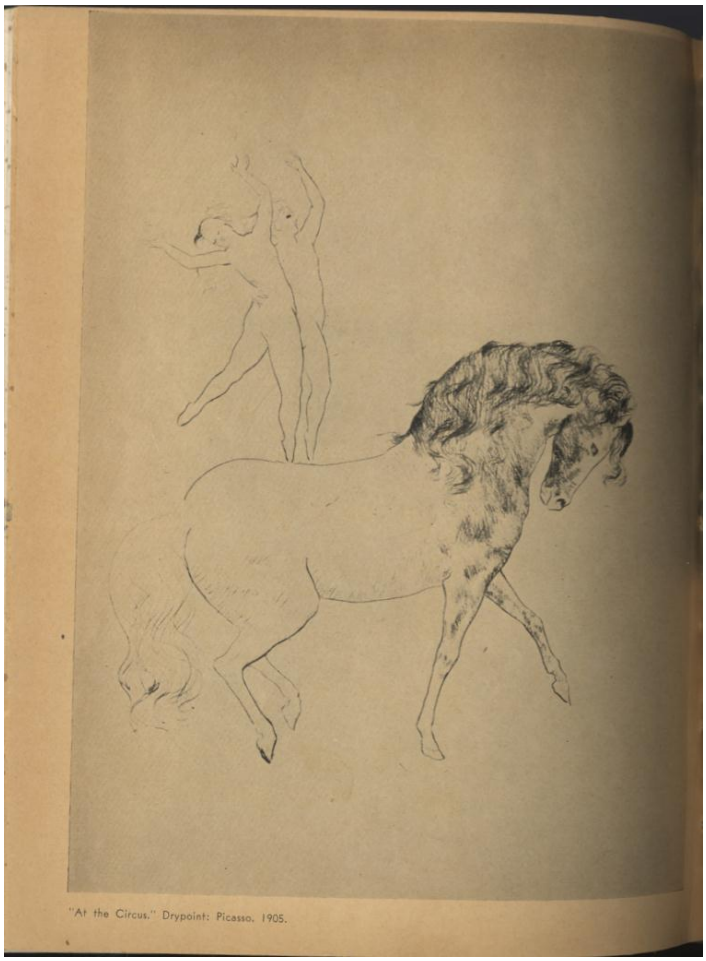

Illustration 15. Reproduction of Picasso's "At the Circus," 1906. Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," *Dance Index.* Vol. V, No. 6, June 1946, p. 154.

These women are not Cornell's typical ballerinas. They wear no clothes, no tutu to connect them easily to stage ballerinas. Their hair flows free, as they balance not in an iteration of one of the proscribed poses codified and catalogued in dance texts. The other images of bareback ballerinas in "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" can easily be

identified as classical ballet poses: 1st *arabesque efface* in the prints by Bridgman and an anonymous artist and *attitude croisée* in Seurat's *Le Cirque*.[110]

The year of the exhibition *Romantic Museum at the Hugo Gallery: Portraits of Women, Constructions and Arrangements by Joseph Cornell*, 1946, marks a high water mark in Cornell's creations devoted to the Romantic Period. According the catalogue designed by Cornell, the exhibition included several works dedicated or related to the romantic ballet—*Portrait of Ondine (Fanny Cerrito*), *Crystal Cage: Portrait of Bernice,* and a work dedicated to Marie Taglioni.[111] These "Portraits of Women" involved in ballet very rarely depict ballerinas dancing. Instead, the works are "homages" which invoke part of the mythology of the celebrity-ballerina.[112] This, perhaps, is the key difference between the equestriennes and Cornell's favorite ballerinas: their celebrity. The only named equestrienne he presents in *Dance Index* is imaginary, Balzac's "imaginary mistress" Malaga. The rest anonymously perform their feats, "symbolic of life" perhaps not only in their ability to face great danger and perform, but also in their anonymity during the process. While Cornell's clowns are discussed as individuals, his equestriennes are but moving images.

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[110] Vaganova, Agrippina, trans. Anatole Chujoy, Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique. New York: Kamin Dance Publishers, 1946. Reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1969.
[111] "Exhibition, 'Romantic Museum at the Hugo Gallery: Portraits of Women.' 1949-1954, undated," Box 14, Folder 31 Joseph Cornell papers, 1804-1986, bulk 1939-1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[112] Hennessey, Christine, "Joseph Cornell: A Balletomane," Archives of American Art Journal. Vol. 23, No. 3, 1983, p. 6-12.

The anonymous, sexualized performers embodied by Picasso's bareback riders are not the wholesome performers one might expect at the sawdust ring. They belong to Cornell's interest in the nighttime entertainments of the adult:

> No matter how patient, though, and no matter how he tries to maintain a child's gaze, Cornell's looking returns to that of an adult…. [*Midnight* Party] composed of much of the same footage as *The Children's Party,* this motion picture contains spectacles…—tightrope walkers, circus acrobats, and performing animals—and as hinted by its title, is more focused on those of the night.[113]

Hauptman describes here the two films—*Midnight Party* and *Children's Party*—that complete the collection of three of Cornell's films which deal with children's entertainments and include imagery from the circus. The "Ballerinas" section displays women as performers. Part of that performance is their sexualization: their short skirts (whatever that means to each period), their décolletage, their bareback riding. This is not to say that Cornell's section expresses a lust for the women; rather, that he recognizes their position as objects of a particular kind of gaze. Certainly, the gaze was often that of a child, but the circus was also attended by men like Paz, gazing with emotions other than mere wonder. It might even have been attended by men like Chaplin's Tramp. The modernist artists Cornell so insistently points to as interested in his equestriennes gazed at their subjects as well. This tension between an apparent, child-like levity and a deeper level of adult darkness is not isolated in "Ballerinas," but present throughout the magazine. Cornell's clowns perform humor in a perpetual melancholy and his elephants perform under duress.

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[113] Hauptman, Jodi, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema,* p. 192.

Cornell labeled Picasso's print "'At the Circus.' Drypoint. Picasso. 1905."[114] Here Cornell includes the work of one of the great modernist masters. Like the materials he includes by Balzac and Toulouse-Lautrec, the name serves to legitimize the theme. The style of the work, its delicate lines, makes it feel more like a drawing than a print. The page's purely visual stimulation is a welcome relief after the extended excerpt from Balzac's "Paz." It demands less time and context from the readers, a reminder of the pure beauty and visuality of the equestrienne performance. As Cornell wrote in his notes to himself, "The ballet makes demands upon us. We must enter into its world of make believe… with great mental effort to participate fully. The happenings in the sawdust ring require no such effort."[115] The readers can immediately appreciate the beauty of Picasso's composition. Cornell allows the work to stand alone, leaving its white space. He includes only the briefest description, no explanatory paragraph like those earlier in the magazine. He requires no "great mental effort," only the pure visual stimulation of the bareback ballerina, her anonymous but artistic introduction to the ballet for many American children.

[114] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 154.
[115] "Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Conclusion: Three Rings

Each of the sections of the magazine stands separately, but they are not fully independent. Each section acknowledges the others in both text and image. Like a Renaissance triptych, the three parts need the others to complete the symbol. A three-ring circus is a classic image of American life. An exploration of only one of the three themes would not investigate the circus but an independent performance tradition. Clowns have a life and history outside of the circus, as do elephants and ballerinas. But the combination of the three immediately evokes the big top, popcorn, and sawdust. Cornell expands beyond the tented performances of American travelling circuses, but in so doing, he draws separate traditions under the tent.

The still of Chaplin peeking through such a tent connects Cornell's "Clowns" section with the "Ballerinas" section. In the film, Chaplin's Tramp falls in love with the circus proprietor's daughter, a bareback horse rider. Here, Chaplin, one of Cornell's clowns, struggles for a voyeuristic view of one of Cornell's ballerinas. The Tramp's position as audience of an equestrienne reminds the readers that we, too, view a performance and that we, the audience, fall in love with the performers, just as Chaplin fell in love with his. The Tramp seems to peer into the magazine itself, perhaps deep into the other side of the issue, where he might see an equestrienne performer quite similar to his love interest in the film staring back.

The largest and smallest circuses in the world frame the magazine—Ringling-Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and a flea circus—encompassing all else within the

context of the circus.[116] In a letter dated the fourth of December 1946, Donald Windham, an editor at *Dance Index*, mentioned "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas." "…I think the circus issue was full of life and the fragmentary three-at-once atmosphere a real performance has."[117] Together, the three sections in "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" represent a circus performance, each section separate but interacting with the others.

Cornell dove deeply into the performance archives available to him, into his own collection, and into contemporary and nineteenth century literature on his subjects. The final page's "Acknowledgment" points to the archival research Cornell undertook.

> *Dance Index* wishes to thank the following for their kindness in lending material for illustrations: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (pp. 144, 145), The Museum of Modern Art (p. 154), The New York Public Library, The Rhodes Island School of Design (p. 146), The Harvard Theatre Collection (pp. 137, 156), and Ringling Bros.-Barnum and Bailey Circus. Our thanks are due, also, to the Robert M. McBride Co., and to E. P. Dutton and Co. for permission to reprint excerpts from books published by them. Other material used in this issue is from Mr. Cornell's collection.[118]

Collecting images and texts from such institutions betrays the professionalism of Cornell's research for his *Dance Index* project. Cornell's collection of sources, drawn

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[116] The image on the inside of the front cover is a photograph of two Ringling-Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus clowns, often publicized as the "The Greatest Show on Earth." Cornell subtitles the top print of two prints on the back cover "Flea Circus Ballerinas. J. G. Francis. 1886." Cornell's archive shows that the print illustrated an article by C. F. Holder called "The Smallest Circus in the World." The archive also includes mention of Ringling's slogan "The Greatest Show on Earth" in the publicity information from the circus.
Holder, C. F., "The Smallest Circus in the World," *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks.* Vol. XIII. New York: The Century Co., May 1836, pp. 533-535.
"Publishing Project, 'Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas,' 1812- circa 1859, 1946" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
"Publishing Projects, Dance Index, 1946, undated," Subject Source Files, Box 17, Folder 23. Joseph Cornell papers, 1804-1986, bulk 1939-1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[117] "Windham, Donald, 1946-1970, undated," Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 10. Joseph Cornell papers, 1804-1986, bulk 1939-1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[118] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 155.

from these cultural and popular institutions, becomes its own archive. Thanks to the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, scholars can easily access even those sources not used but collected during the publication's creation. The file, "Publishing Project: Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas," includes 186 pages of digitized material. Other materials relating to the project lay scattered throughout Cornell's archive in folders such as "La Malaga," "Romantic Ballet," and "Publishing Projects: *Dance Index."* Cornell did not hastily throw this magazine issue together. He carefully and systematically researched the subject, bringing together diverse materials in order to build the world of the circus for *Dance Index* readers.

The diversity of source materials incorporated into the issue reflects the vastness of the subject area. Cornell did not limit himself to American sources from the travelling circus. Instead, he drew materials from France, the UK, and the United States. He did not focus purely on the past or the present, but on the idea of heritage and legacy as reflected by both. More than just a research paper on the circus, Cornell uses each to explore larger social and political issues as well as artistic traditions. "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" represents a crystallization of a moment in one of his many "explorations." His "editors and art directors lamented his legendary perfectionism and phobic disregard of deadlines," but worked through it anyways, helping him to finalize his collage if only for a moment.[119]

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[119] Hartigan, Lynda Roscoe, "Joseph Cornell's Explorations : Art on File, " *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp… in resonance,* p. 233.

The three rings—Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas—represent explorations of different types of performers, different realms of being. In clowns, Cornell presents the masculine, engaged with politics, cerebral, and closest to the great traditions of ballet. Cornell paints the elephants as representative of imperial subjugation and the world of nature, present at the beginnings of ballet. The ballerinas perform femininity, also managing to balance the wild and civilization. Reading the magazine (watching Cornell's circus) stimulates an investigation into circus identity and then identity itself. Every source shows a performance. Each man, elephant, woman, and horse plays a part.

The clown's gestures build complicated narratives that undermine social norms, but also engage in larger society in a decidedly masculine way. His concerns are martial and political—the atom bomb, the Napoleonic Wars, and the fall of the aristocracy. His performance is generative, transformative. He does not only display, but actively changes reality, drawing things into existence and changing items already existent. The elephant dances for the empire, representing the human triumph over nature and nature's struggle to maintain balance. It performs, both willingly and unwillingly, not as an artistic endeavor but as a novelty. Its performance does not come naturally, but through the capture and suppression of its normal behavior. When the elephant performs, the Western empire succeeds in civilizing the East. Ballerinas perform their femininity with a strength belied by their grace. They both defy and reinforce gender roles, maintaining grace in the face of danger. They primly pose in arabesques as they ride around a ring at full gallop. Cornell explores them all: man, woman, and beast, three basic types of beings in the world.

This thesis cannot claim to explore the complexity of every page, paragraph, and picture in "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas." An equally worthwhile project might look only at one chapter, carefully teasing out each relationship. It also does not claim to place Cornell's history of the circus into a complete history of the three-rings. It does endeavor to provide an understanding of Cornell's working method, his sense of history, and the ways his juxtapositions of word and image provide meaning to readers. As Kirstein writes in the opening comment, "Mr. Cornell has a very special gift; the energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast. For him, the inconsequential past is neither frivolous nor dead."[120] By making that "inconsequential past" alive in the traditions of today, it becomes anything but frivolous. Charlie Chaplin is Joseph Grimaldi. Elephants danced ballet in the 1670s and the 1940s. Women inspire lust and admiration as they ride around the ring as much today as they did in Balzac's time. Or so Cornell would have it. I must disagree with Cornell himself, too, in the only reference I have found of the artist discussing "Clowns, Elephants and Ballerinas" after its publication. In the letter to Marianne Moore, Cornell writes, "I regret that so little of the enchantment that I felt while working on the Circus issue of *Dance Index* got into the pages."[121] Much of his "enchantment" "got into the pages" of *Dance Index.* His fragmentary collage brings to life lost performances.

"Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas" is not just commercial work for hire, but an audience-specific work of art. Cornell knew his audience and knew its knowledge base.

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[120] Cornell, Joseph, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas," p. 138.
[121] Caws, Mary Ann ed., *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files*. New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, pp. 133-134

Admittedly, he stretched the limits of the magazine's normal themes, expanding *Dance Index's* subject matter from strictly concert dance to encompass all types of live, bodily performance. But he did not make this leap on his own, and many of the themes would have been familiar to educated dance scholars. He brought to the work his keen eye for popular imagery, and his abilities to combine word and image into refined collages. This project extends his typical collage project, letting it stretch across twenty-four pages rather than just one. He pays attention to pacing, just as he does in his film projects. Full pages of text require the readers to slow down, while full pages of imagery provide instant information yet reward a second look. Self-contained, yet made fuller by context, obscure, erudite, yet full of popular references, both quick and slow, "Clowns, Elephants, and Ballerinas" demands serious attention as part of Cornell's oeuvre.

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